

THE CREATOR EFFECTIVENESS PLAYBOOK

How to build your brand with creators



WPP Media

System1

TikTok

CREATORS BUILD BRANDS. NOW WHAT?

Last year, System1 and TikTok published **The Long and the Short (form) of It**, setting out how entertaining paid short-form ads build brands for the long term and convert demand in the short term. It helped reset how marketers think about creative effectiveness in short-form.

A year on, marketers know short-form ads can do the long and the short. The next question is who is making it.

Creators have moved from the edge of the media plan into the center of how brands show up. In this playbook, we are focused on creator ads: paid ads made with creators, run as advertising, and measured through brand lift. Organic creator advocacy and earned social matter too, but this is about the brand-building job of paid creator-led ads: how they build the

brand memories that make the brand easier to choose later, and how to plan them to do it again and again.

The prize is large, and it is not automatic. In *The Long and the Short (form) of It*, creator ads earned more attention than brand ads, but they were less likely to leave people remembering the brand.

However, creator ads that do brand early and create positive emotion provide a huge opportunity for brands of all sizes to increase mass brand awareness. That finding sets up the next question. If paid creator ads can build brands, what makes some of them work so much harder than others?

That is what this playbook sets out to answer.

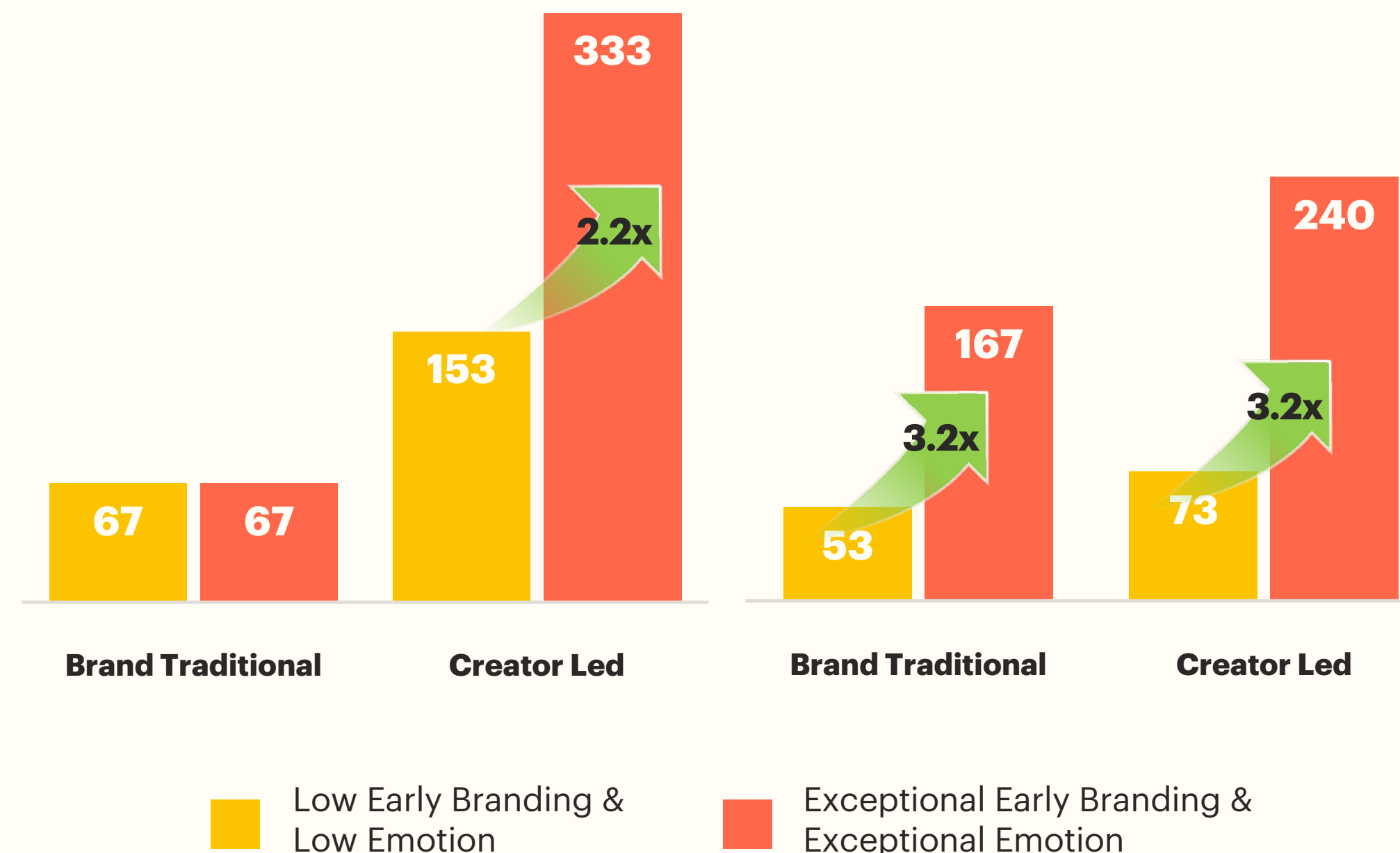
CREATOR ADS THAT BRAND EARLY AND CREATE POSITIVE EMOTION PROVIDE A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS OF ALL SIZES TO INCREASE BRAND AWARENESS.

BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

Small Brands
Challengers & Contenders

BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

Large Brands
Category Leaders



Base for this analysis: Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for both Star Rating and Early Branding combined. Split by creative style (Brand Traditional, Brand Native, Creator Led). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

A NEW GLOBAL **CREATOR** EFFECTIVENESS PLAYBOOK

This playbook brings together one of the largest global datasets yet on short-form creator effectiveness: 1,217 paid TikTok ads, across eight markets: US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil and Mexico.

Built by WPP Media, System1 and TikTok, the study measures creative response among 182,550 TikTok users and connects it to in-market brand lift data from TikTok.

Across the full dataset, the work represents an estimated \$70.5m in media spend and 23.6bn impressions, giving us a rare view of creator effectiveness at real scale.

The analysis includes global short-form evidence matched to 350+ TikTok in-market brand and conversion lift studies.

The result is a practical playbook for making paid creator ads build your brand: what to measure, what to ignore, how to choose the right creator, and how to brief.

1,217 PAID ADS.
8 MARKETS.
183K+ TIKTOK USERS.
\$70.5M MEDIA SPEND.
23.6BN IMPRESSIONS.



FROM THE AUTHORS

“ Creators are no longer a “new” advertising opportunity, and should not be an uncertain investment. Yet, too often, they are. That is because beneath the headline statistics around creator impact lies significant performance variability – an exceptional minority is elevating an underperforming majority. For the first time, this playbook codifies creator impact. It provides a robust, validated blueprint to eliminate unpredictability and drive creator effectiveness forward. ”



JOSHUA GORNELL
VICE PRESIDENT | COMMERCIAL PAID SOCIAL
WPP MEDIA

“ The industry has finally moved on from engagement to attention, and we understand that creators demand more attention. But this research moves the conversation forward again; from attention to Brand Memory. It shows how creators build more of these memories for marketers, but importantly why: because they entertain and create more emotion, and just as importantly, it gives marketers a guide for how to steer creators to do even more of it. ”



ANDREW TINDALL
CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER
SYSTEM1

“ The best creator work happens when the brand understands the world it is entering. A creator already has their own cues and audience expectations, and the brand has to earn its place inside that. This playbook gives marketers a shared language for making those choices: what to measure, what to look for, and how to brief the work so the brand is remembered. ”



BETH MARCHANT
STRATEGY DIRECTOR
SYSTEM1

“ Creators know how to make content people actually want to watch. What we want from brands is entertaining, native work that earns its place on the platform. This playbook moves us closer to that: it shows how to keep the brand memorable while the work stays true to the creator and to TikTok. ”



CALLUM MAYFIELD SMITH
HEAD OF PRODUCT MARKETING COMMS, EUROPE & ISRAEL
TIKTOK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PART 1

#CURRENTLANDSCAPE

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Creators have earned their place in advertising. The IPA shows creator investment paying back commercially, with the strongest signal in long-term impact. Effie and System1 show creators among the strongest touchpoints for building future demand. Our own data shows why creator ads stick in people's minds: they drive more Brand Memory Lift (*the increase in Brand Awareness and Ad Recall above a matched control*) than brand ads.

The problem is not potential, it's that ads are still judged too often on likes, views, watch time, follower count, or no meaningful KPI at all. Those signals may describe what happened around the post, but they do not tell a brand whether anyone remembered it. With the wrong measures, brands scale ads they cannot properly judge, and the Creative Quality (*positive emotion paired with Early Branding*) of creator ads has suffered.

PART 2

#NEWFUNDAMENTALS

THE NEW FUNDAMENTALS

Brand Memory is built by three things working together.

Creative Quality is the first. It combines positive emotion and Early Branding (*earning brand recognition in the first 2 seconds*): the ad makes people feel something, and the brand is recognized quickly enough to own that feeling. Creative Quality explains Brand Memory Lift around five times better than the best engagement metric we tested.

Creator Fame (*the share of the audience that recognizes the creator*) is the second. If a viewer recognizes a creator, it gives a creator ad a head start.

Brand Fit (*the share of the audience that believes the brand is a good fit for the creator and vice versa*) is the third. It explains why the brand belongs in the creator's world.

PART 3

#HOWTOPLAN

HOW TO PLAN

The job of planning is to maximize the three levers that build Brand Memory: Creator Fame, Brand Fit and Creative Quality.

Creator Fame and Brand Fit are strategy decisions. Start with the human need the brand wants to dramatize, then find the creator world that can bring it to life. Check whether the audience recognizes the creator or world, and whether the brand has a natural role there.

Then the brief has to prioritize Creative Quality. Entertainment earns the emotion. Early Branding gives the brand the credit. There are ways to increase your chances of both.

That is the planning model: set the conditions, then brief the ads. Strategy sets the ceiling. The brief decides how much of it you reach. A great brief can lift a strong strategy further, but it cannot rescue weak Creator Fame, weak Brand Fit or the wrong creator world.

PART 1

#CURRENTLANDSCAPE

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CREATORS,
AND WHAT THE INDUSTRY HAS BEEN
GETTING WRONG.

Creators have earned their place in the effectiveness conversation.

Evidence shows creators paying back commercially, especially over the long term, and that creators sit among the strongest touchpoints for building future demand. Our own data shows creator ads build more Brand Memory than brand ads.

So, the problem is not a lack of potential but what we measure creator success with.

Creator ads are still judged too often on impressions, views, likes, comments, Engagement Rate and follower count. Those metrics can show what happened around a post but they cannot show whether the brand was remembered.

Part 1 sets up the gap: creators can build brands, but the industry has been scaling work it cannot properly judge.



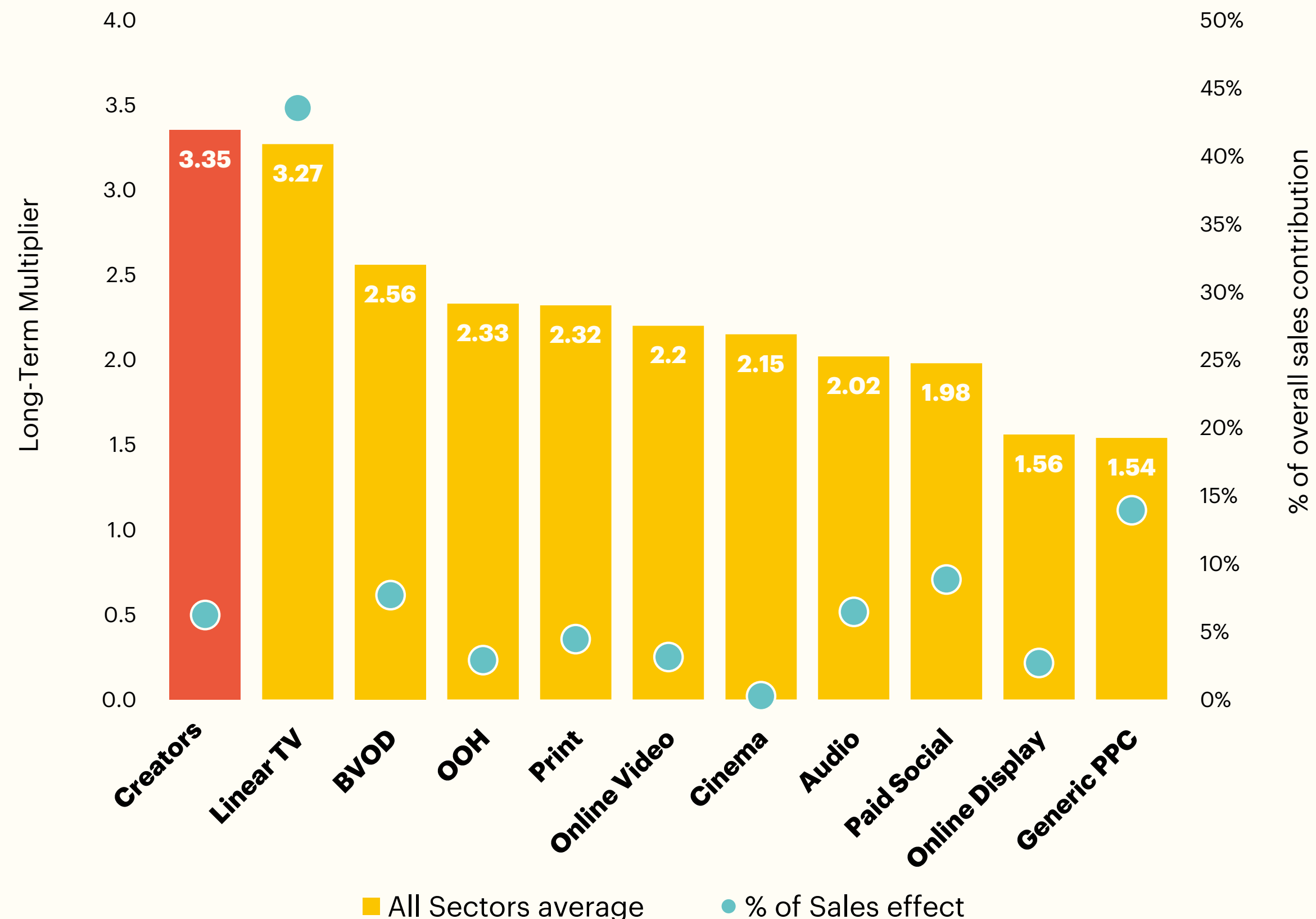
CREATORS ARE BRAND BUILDERS.

The IPA's Influencer Benchmarking databank gave the industry its first cross-industry read on creator payback: 220 campaigns from 144 brands across 36 sectors and 28 markets, covering £133m in creator spend. That scale matters, because for years the channel has been judged by the metrics most readily available: likes, views, comments, engagement rate, follower count. The IPA data shifts the conversation to commercial return.

In the short term, creators perform like a serious channel, delivering an ROI comparable with linear TV on short-term efficiency and ahead of standard paid social. The volume story is different: influencers contribute 4.5% of short-term sales in the UK sample, against 13% for paid social and 32% for linear TV.

The more telling finding is what happens over time. In the long-term, creators deliver an ROI index well ahead of paid social and carry the highest long-term multiplier of any channel measured: just ahead of linear TV.

LONG-TERM MULTIPLIER & % OF OVERALL SALES EFFECT BY CHANNEL (UK ONLY) LONG-TERM MULTIPLIER = TOTAL EFFECT (SHORT- & LONG-TERM)/SHORT-TERM EFFECT



IPA Influencer Benchmarking, 2025. Presented at the IPA Effectiveness Conference. Cross-industry Influencer Database spanning 220 campaigns from 144 brands across 36 sectors and 28 markets, capturing more than £133m in influencer spend. UK short-term ROI findings based on 59 campaigns and benchmarked against Thinkbox Profit Ability 2. UK long-term ROI and multiplier findings based on 18 campaigns.

CREATORS ARE A SUPER TOUCHPOINT.

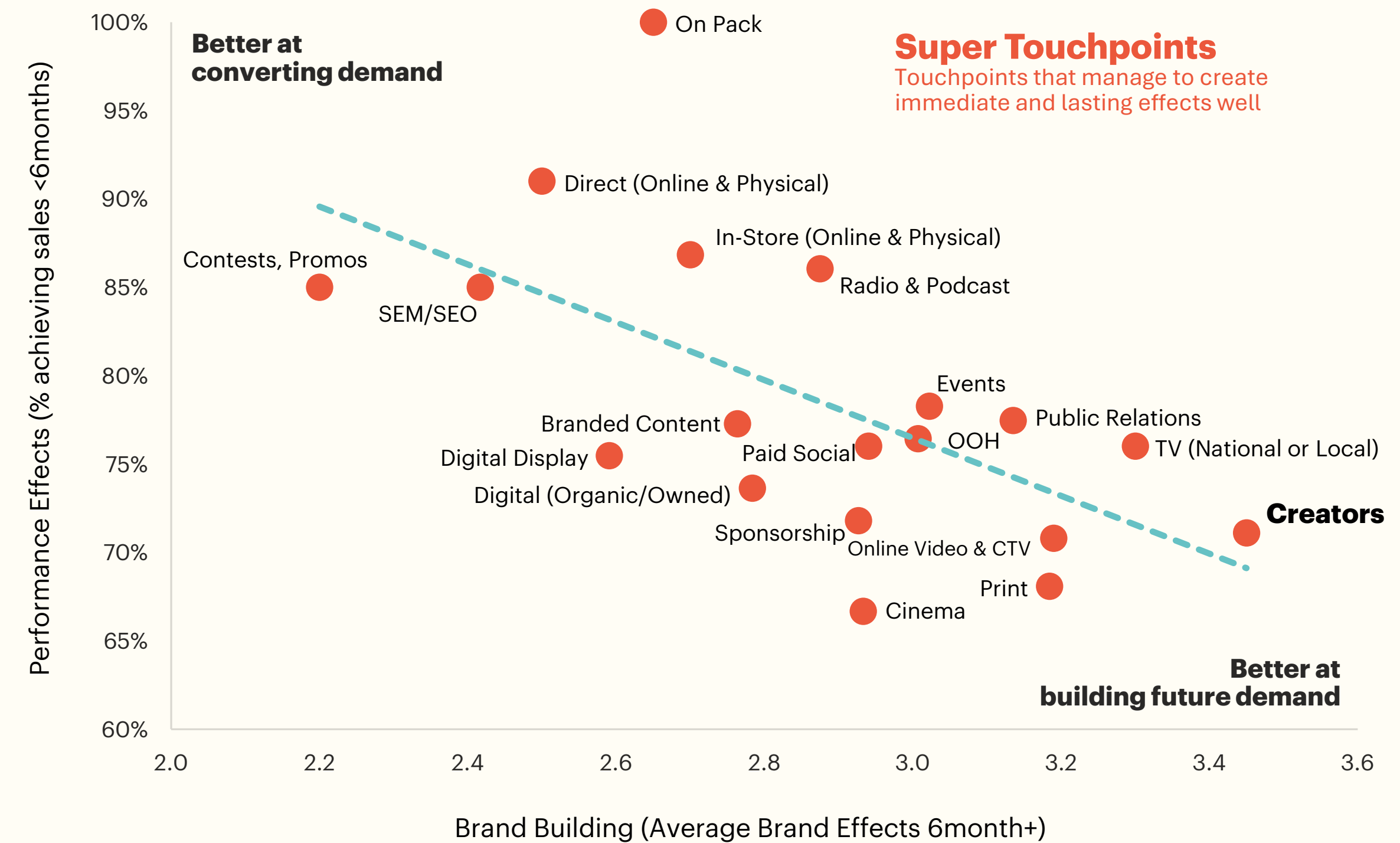
Effie and System1 point in the same direction from a different angle. *The Creative Dividend* asks which touchpoints help campaigns create immediate commercial effects and lasting Brand Effects.

Here, creators show the strongest average ability to build Brand Effects of any touchpoint. Ahead of TV, Radio, Print and Cinema, in the same dataset.

That should reset how the industry thinks about creators. Not only a social tactic. A brand-building touchpoint sitting alongside the formats marketers have relied on for decades.

SUPER TOUCHPOINTS

Touchpoints that manage to create immediate and lasting effects well.



The Creative Dividend, Effie and System1, 2026. Analysis of 1,265 Effie Insights campaigns across the US, Europe, UK and Ireland, 2007-2023, linked to System1 creative measurement and media support. Dataset represents nearly \$140bn in category revenue. Creator touchpoints include organic creator work and paid creator partnerships.

CREATORS BUILD MORE BRAND MEMORY.

The evidence that creators pay back over the long term raises an obvious question: why? Long-term return doesn't come from converting demand that already exists, that's the short-term job. It comes from building future demand.

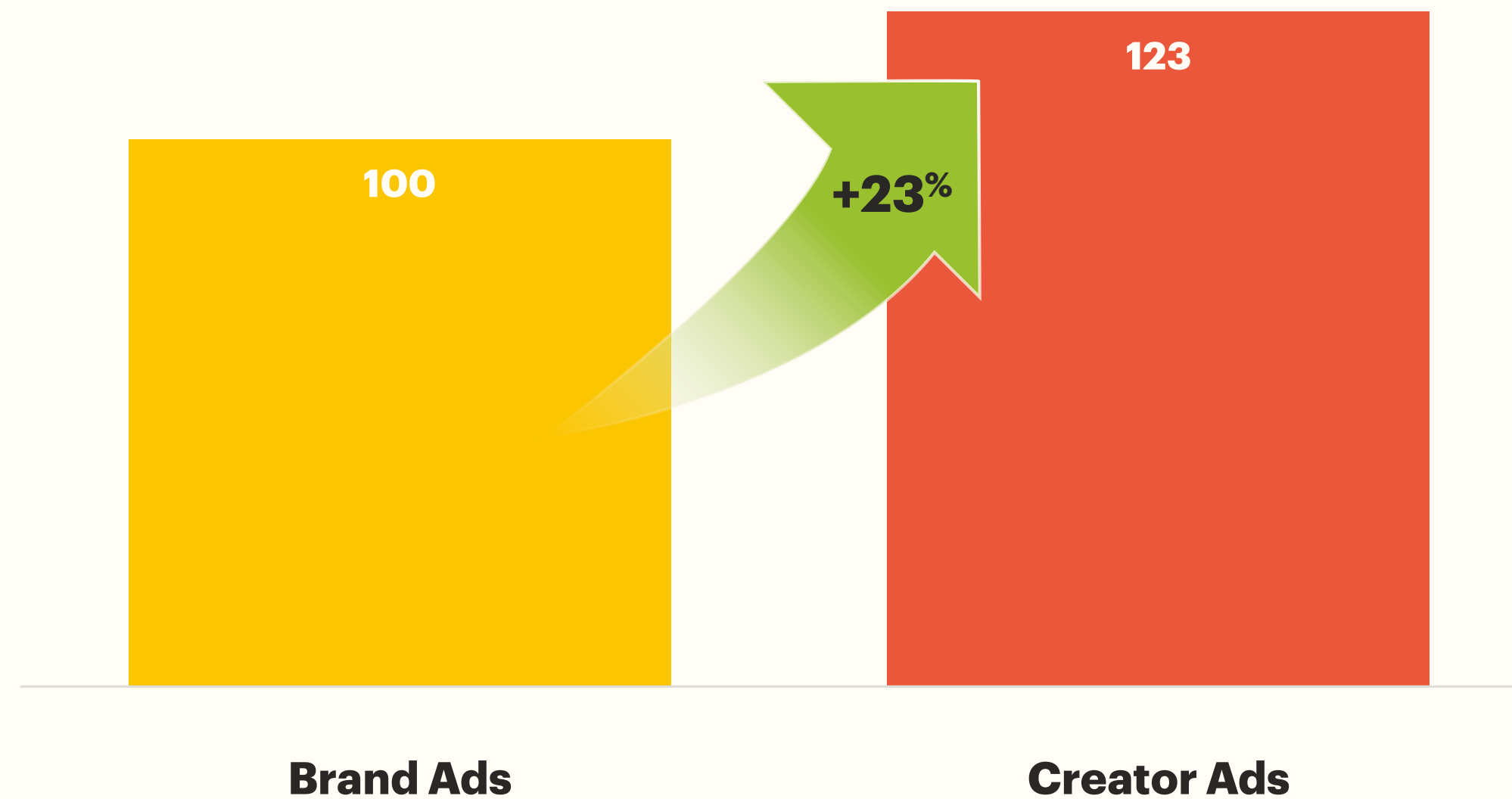
Long-term return depends on being remembered before people are actively in-market. WPP Media's How Humans Decide, drawn from 1.2 million purchase journeys, shows that **84% of purchases go to brands people were already biased toward before they began actively looking.** That is why Brand Memory matters. If creator ads are going to build brands, they need to do more than earn attention, views or engagement. They need to make the brand easier to remember later.

That is where creators have a real advantage. In our data, **creator ads deliver 23% more Brand Memory Lift than brand ads** on short-form.

#BRANDMEMORY

BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Measured Brand Awareness & Ad Recall Lift (Indexed)



WPP Media and Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, How Humans Decide, October 2025, 1.2m purchase journeys. Base for this analysis: 337 campaigns with measured Brand Memory Lift; 195 brand-made and 142 creator campaigns. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1. From eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico)

STOP CHASING CLICKS. CHASE BRAND MEMORY.

Advertising works by building and refreshing memory.

Brands grow by strengthening the memory structures that make them easier to notice, recognize and retrieve in buying situations. A brand is the network of feelings, cues, associations and category moments people can call on when a choice is being made.

That's not new, it's how brand building works. The problem is that creator measurement has lagged behind that thinking.

Too much creator work is still judged by the easiest numbers to collect: impressions, views, likes, comments, engagement and attention. Those measures can tell us something about delivery and response, but they do not tell us whether the brand became easier to remember.

Creator ads should be held to the same brand-building standard as any other advertising.

That means measuring **Brand Memory Lift**: whether exposure to the ad increased people's memory of the brand versus a matched control group.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT = BRAND AWARENESS LIFT & AD RECALL LIFT (WEIGHTED 2:1)

How much an ad lifts people's memory of the brand, against a matched control group.

AD RECALL THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE AD IS REMEMBERED

BRAND AWARENESS TELLS US WHETHER THAT MEMORY LINKED BACK TO THE BRAND ITSELF.

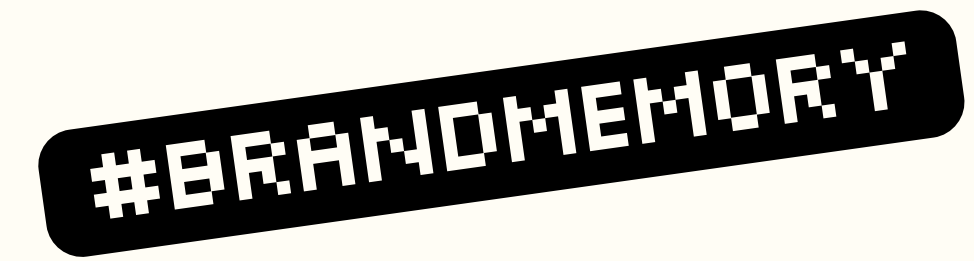
That brand link is why Brand Awareness carries more weight, because remembered advertising only becomes useful Brand Memory when the brand owns it. Also, across the entire dataset, brand awareness is twice as hard to move as ad recall.

The industry now needs to move the creator scoreboard up to the standard of brandbuilding. Keep platform metrics in their place but stop asking them to prove what they can't.

Use Brand Memory Lift to judge what worked, what should be remade and what deserves to scale.

#BRAND MEMORY

ENGAGEMENT IS NOT BRAND MEMORY.



Engagement Rate is the metric creator marketing leans on most heavily. It is easy to see, easy to compare and easy to report.

But across **129.6M engagements**, Engagement Rate shows **no significant relationship** with Brand Memory Lift.

A high Engagement Rate can mean people liked the creator, the joke, the trend, the comments, the argument, or the format. It doesn't mean the audience left more likely to remember the brand later.

The industry keeps relying on engagement anyway.

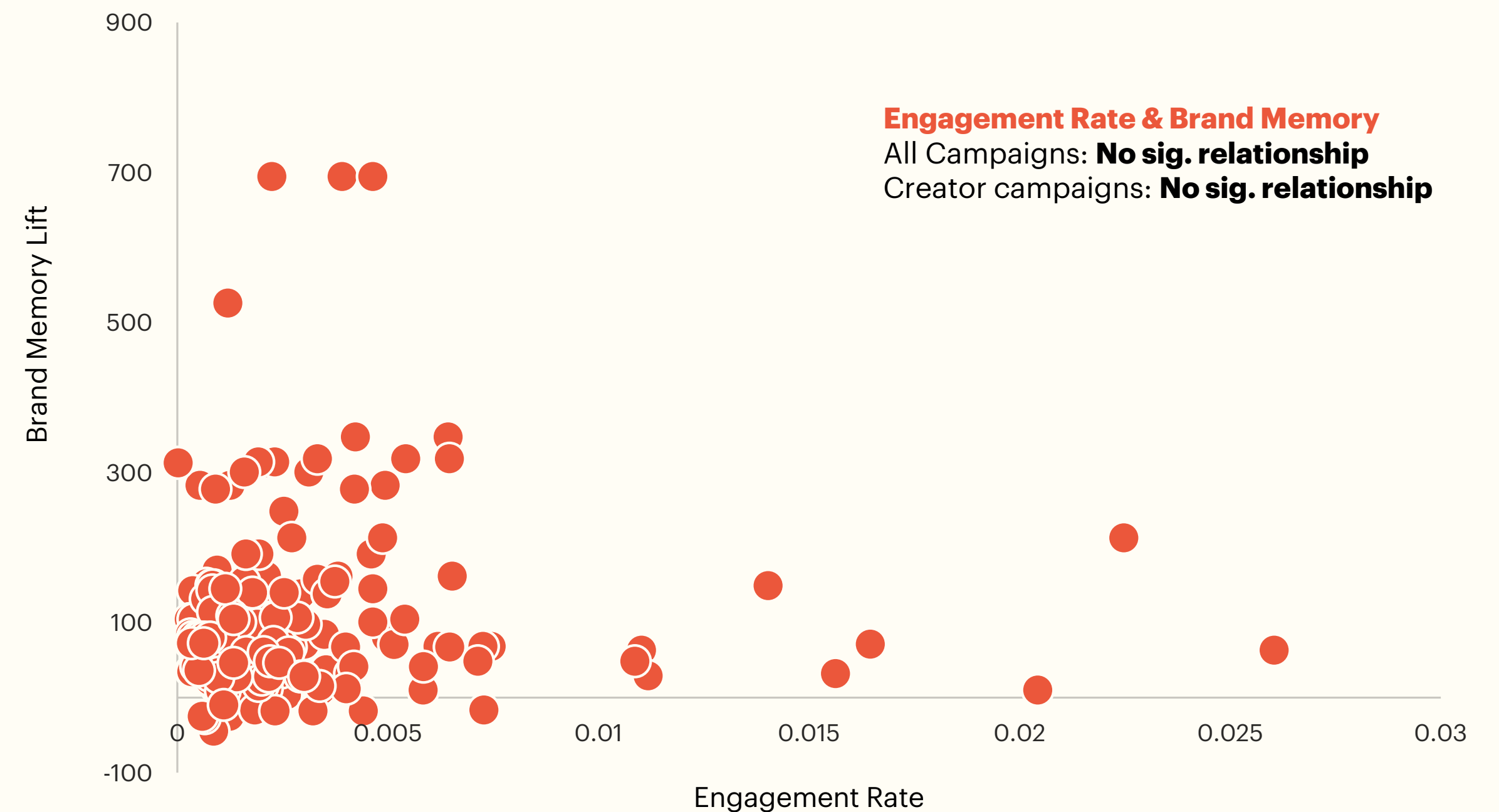
In part because it's easy to measure, in part because there's a lack of clarity on what should be measured and how.

In fact, a 2025 WARC study found that 44% of marketers run creator campaigns without setting any KPIs whatsoever, while 38% measure creators only on ROI or ROAS, missing the brand-building job altogether.

44% OF MARKETERS RUN CREATOR CAMPAIGNS WITHOUT SETTING ANY KPIS WHATSOEVER (WARC, 2025)

BRAND MEMORY LIFT, BY ENGAGEMENT RATE

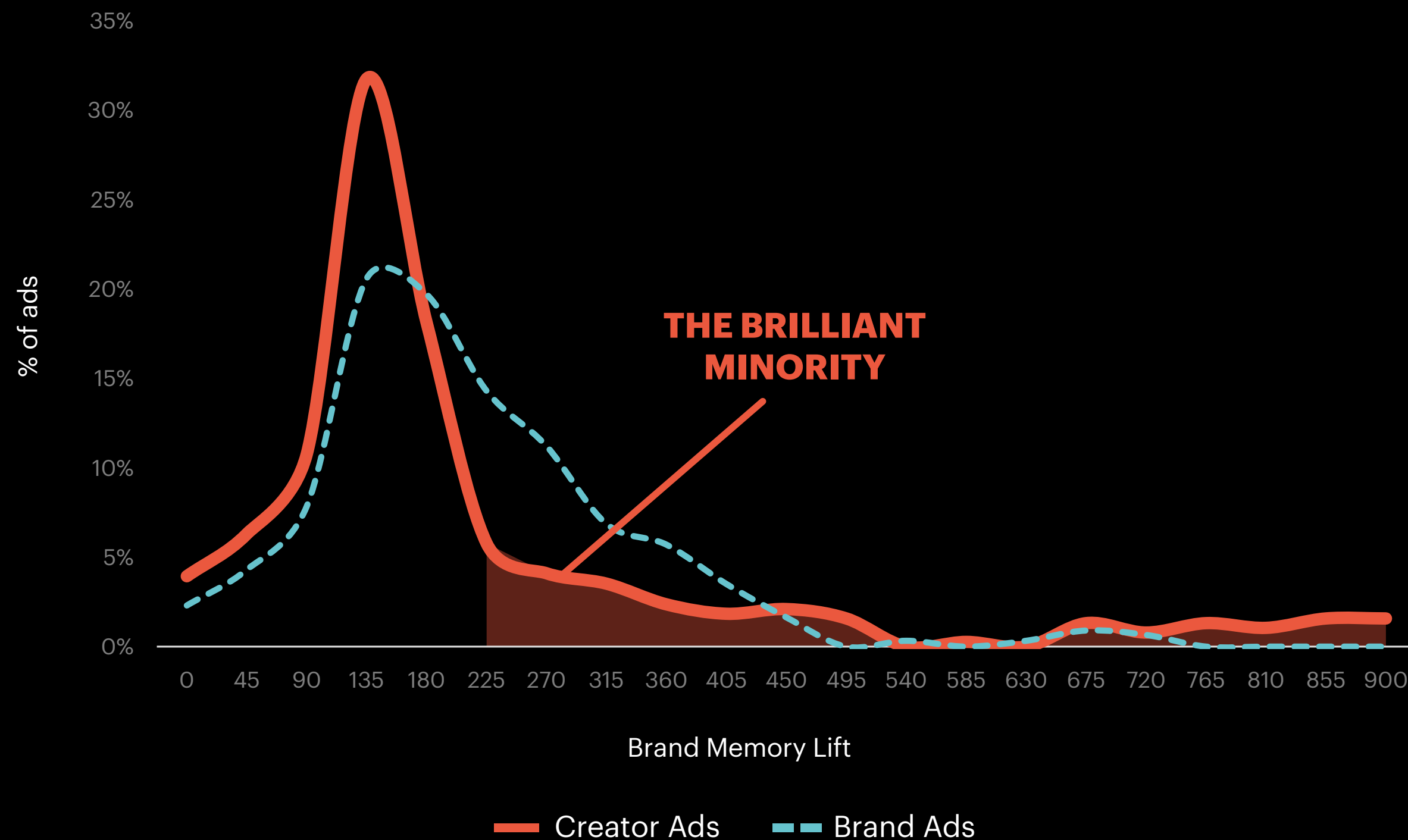
Measured Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 129.6m engagements analyzed against 231 TikTok Brand Lift Studies across the UK, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, France, Spain, Germany and the US, matched for brand size, including 90 creator campaigns. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1. WARC source: Dan Wilson, "Three Lessons on the Effectiveness of Influencer and Creator Marketing," WARC, 17 August 2025.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT DISTRIBUTION

Measured & Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



CREATORS RELY ON THE BRILLIANT MINORITY.

Despite creator ads building more Brand Memory overall, only 29% beat the average brand ad. The advantage is real, but it is concentrated in a brilliant few.

That is why creators can feel like a gamble, in large part because the industry has measured them by the wrong levers, incentivizing views and engagement rather than the inputs that actually build Brand Memory.

Across the dataset, Brand Memory Lift is strikingly uneven. Most creator ads bunch at the low end, while a thin tail of exceptional ads, the brilliant minority, does the heavy lifting: the top 20% of creator ads generate 45% of all creator Brand Memory Lift, and the top 10% deliver around 4x the lift per ad of the rest. The rest of this playbook is about making creators less of a gamble, understanding what that brilliant minority does differently, then briefing more creator ads into the high-performing tail.

#BRANDMEMORY

Base for this analysis: 687 Brand Memory Lift figures across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico) on TikTok – 337 measured via TikTok Brand Lift Studies and 350 modeled via System1 Test Your Ad Social, among 182,550 TikTok users. Split brand-made vs creator-made (306 vs 381).

COMMENTS BEAT ENGAGEMENT BUT STILL STRUGGLE TO EXPLAIN BRAND MEMORY LIFT.

We didn't want to write off engagement entirely. Engagement Rate may simply have been too blunt an instrument, but the underlying idea, that what people do with an ad tells you something, is still worth testing. Perhaps we just needed a sharper version of it.

So we looked at the ratio of comments to likes on an ad. Comments cost more effort: you have to stop, think, type. When a post earns a higher comments-to-likes ratio, it suggests the ad provoked a real reaction rather than a passive scroll-and-tap. A question, a disagreement, a joke, a tag. That felt like the closest thing engagement data has to a meaningful response, and the best shot at a signal that might actually track Brand Memory Lift.

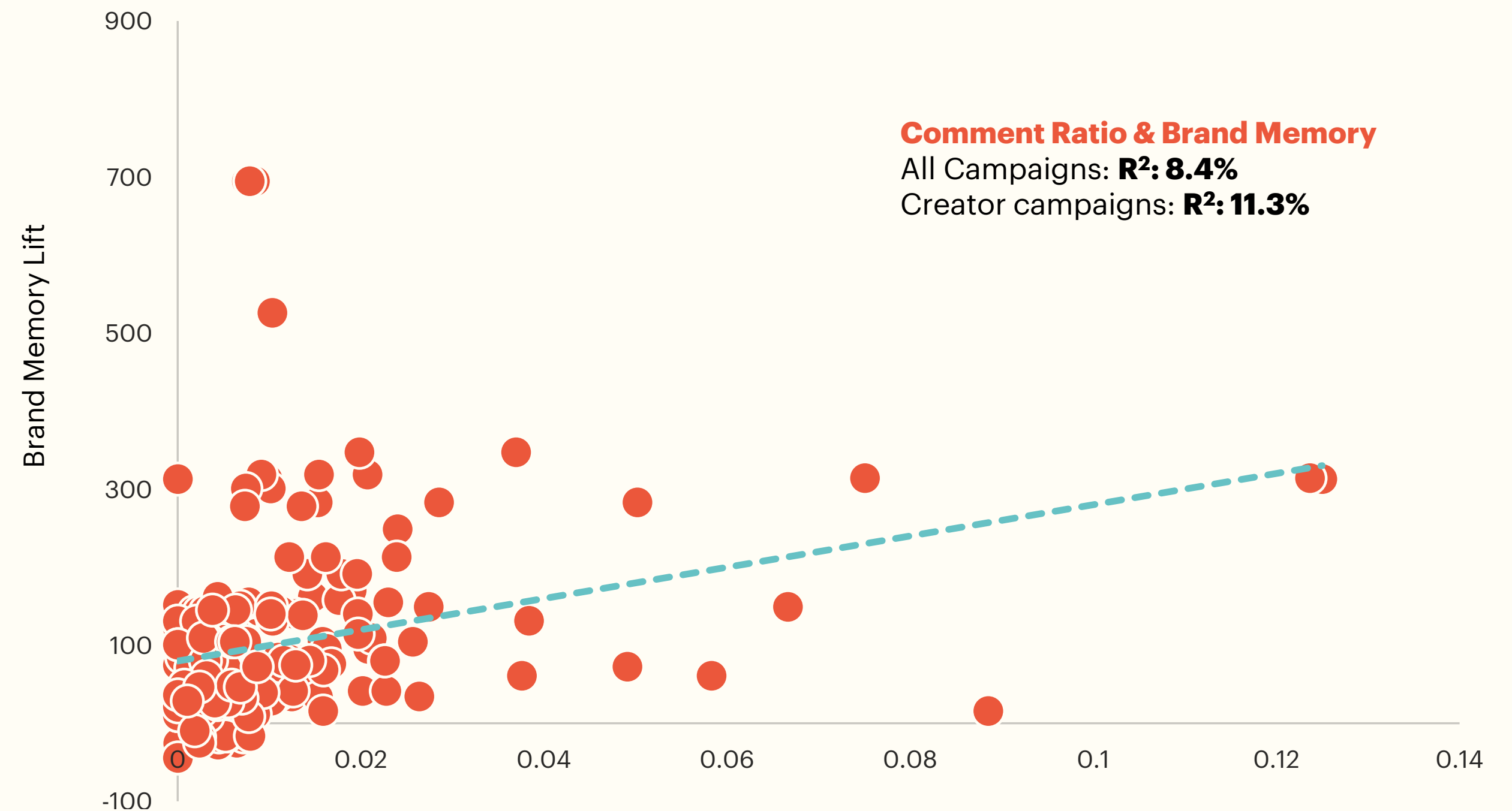
And it does help. For creator ads, comments-to-likes explains 11.3% of Brand Memory Lift, noticeably better than Engagement Rate. But almost nine in ten outcomes still sit outside what this metric can see. A smarter engagement signal is more useful, but it is just nowhere near enough on its own.

#BRANDMEMORY

COMMENT-TO-LIKE RATIO SOMEWHAT EXPLAINS BRAND MEMORY LIFT

BRAND MEMORY LIFT, BY COMMENT-TO-LIKE RATIO

Measured Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 129.6m engagements analyzed against 231 TikTok Brand Lift Studies across the UK, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, France, Spain, Germany and the US, matched for brand size, including 90 creator campaigns. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1. Linear line of best fit, $y = 2003.38x + 79.73$, $p < .001$.

PART 1 TAKEAWAYS

WHERE THE INDUSTRY STANDS

CREATORS ARE BRAND BUILDERS.

Creators pay back over the long term, and they do it because they can build Brand Memory: the memory structures that make a brand easier to choose later.

1

ENGAGEMENT ISN'T BRAND MEMORY.

Engagement Rate is still the default metric creator ads are judged on, but it explains around 0.2% of Brand Memory Lift, and comments-to-likes around 11.3%, leaving almost all of the outcome unexplained.

Brands have been scaling work without a dependable read on whether the brand was remembered.

2

CREATORS RELY ON THE BRILLIANT MINORITY.

Most creator ads bunch at the low end of Brand Memory Lift, while a small minority of brilliant ads do the heavy lifting for the channel.

The next job is to make that less rare: understand what strong creator ads do differently, then plan and brief for it.

3

PART 2

#NEWFUNDAMENTALS

THE NEW FUNDAMENTALS

THE THREE THINGS THAT LIFT BRAND MEMORY, AND HOW THEY MULTIPLY.

Part 1 showed the gap. Creators can build **Brand Memory** (whether the brand is recognized and recalled after the ad), but the industry has been measuring them with signals that do not reliably explain whether the brand was remembered.

Part 2 replaces that scoreboard with the levers that do.

The first is Creative Quality: emotion and early brand recognition working together. The ad has to make people feel something, and the brand has to be recognized

quickly enough to own that feeling. When both are high, Brand Memory Lift more than doubles.

Then the creator choice lifts it further. Creator Fame gives a creator ad a head start. Brand Fit makes the brand belong.

The big finding is what happens when the levers stack. High Creative Quality, high fame and high Brand Fit lift Brand Memory to almost four times the weak baseline.



CREATIVE QUALITY EXPLAINS BRAND MEMORY.

If engagement does not build Brand Memory, what does?

The first contributor is Creative Quality: Emotion (Star Rating) working together with Early Branding.

Emotion matters because it helps the memory form. Early Branding matters because it gives the brand credit for that memory. A creator ad can make people laugh, feel something, or stay watching, but if the brand lands too late, too much of that value stays with the creator, the joke or the moment.

We've found that Brand Memory Lift does not rise evenly as emotion improves; the gains accelerate as creator ads become more emotional. That is why Emotion is cubed in our Creative Quality score. As emotional response rises, the model predicts disproportionately more Brand Memory formation.

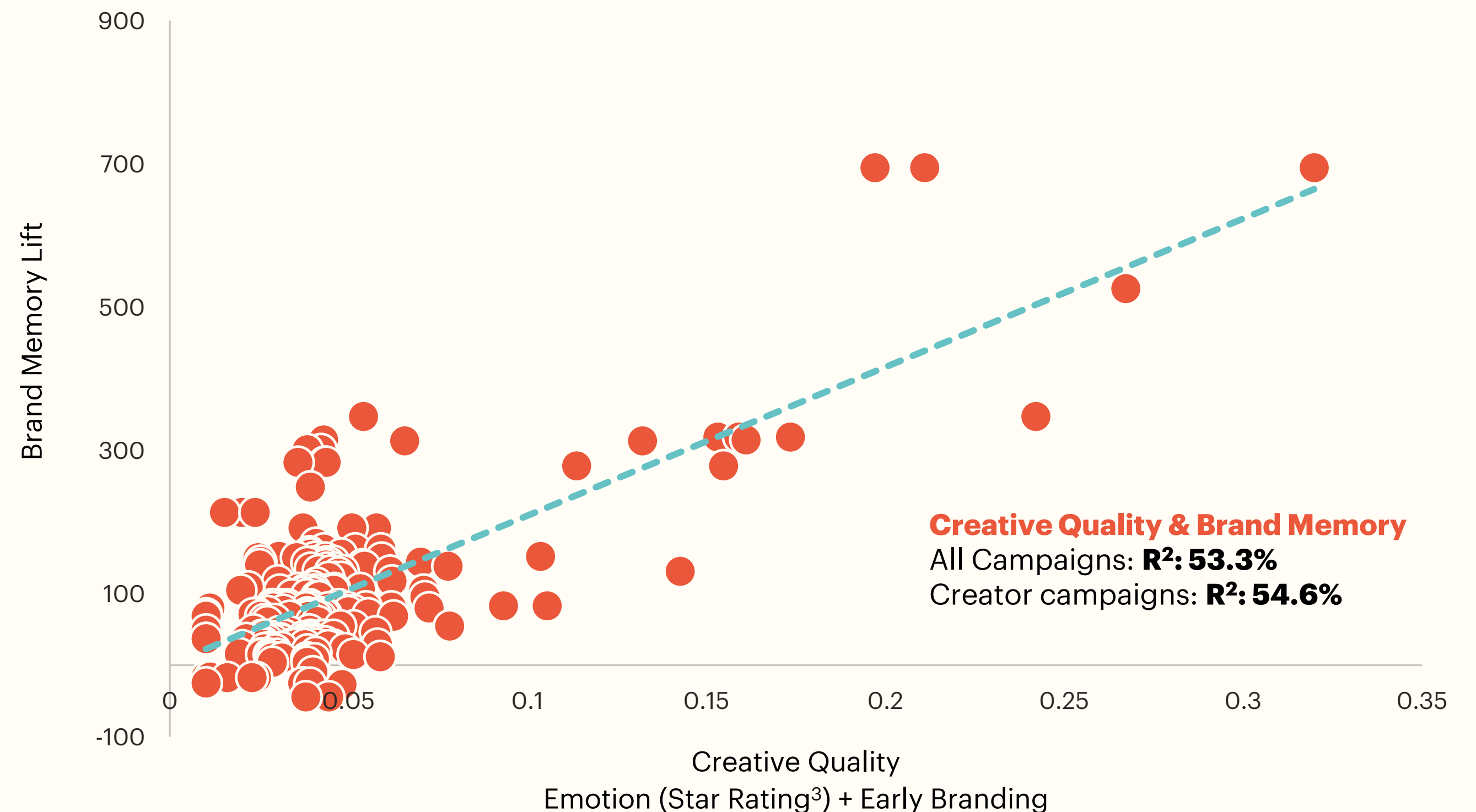
Early Branding still matters. It is the part that makes the memory useful to the brand. But Emotion is doing more of the heavy lifting, carrying around three times the weight of Early Branding.

CREATIVE QUALITY EXPLAINS THE MAJORITY OF BRAND MEMORY LIFT

#CREATIVEQUALITY

BRAND MEMORY LIFT, BY CREATIVE QUALITY

Measured Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



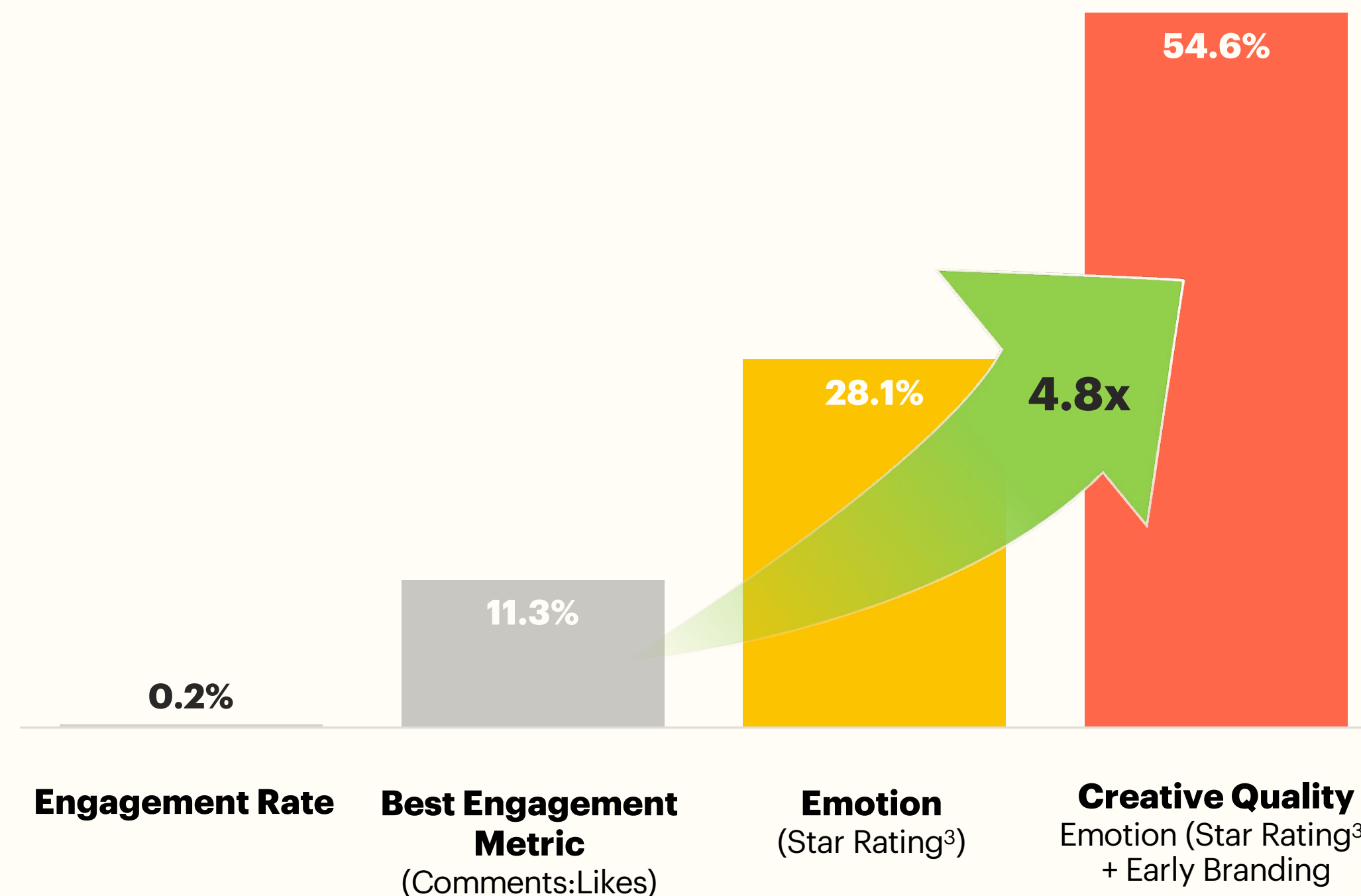
Base for this analysis: 231 TikTok Brand Lift Studies across the UK, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, France, Spain, Germany and the US, matched for brand size, including 90 creator campaigns. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1. Creative Quality = Emotion (Star Rating³) + Early Branding, measured by System1 Test Your Ad Social with 34,650 TikTok users. Emotion is cubed because its relationship with Brand Memory Lift accelerates; Early Branding = Fast Fluency (% correct early brand recognition in 2 seconds). 129.6m engagements analyzed.

CREATIVE QUALITY EXPLAINS BRAND MEMORY LIFT 4.8X BETTER THAN ENGAGEMENT.

#CREATIVEQUALITY

EXPLANATORY POWER OF BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Fit (R²) of linear relationship



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COMPOUND EQUITY: SAME SECONDS. TWICE THE BRAND MEMORY.

Creative Quality (Emotion + Early Branding) sets the value of attention. Attention compounds it.

Creators have an attention advantage. They are good at making ads people choose to watch. But those seconds don't all carry the same value for the brand.

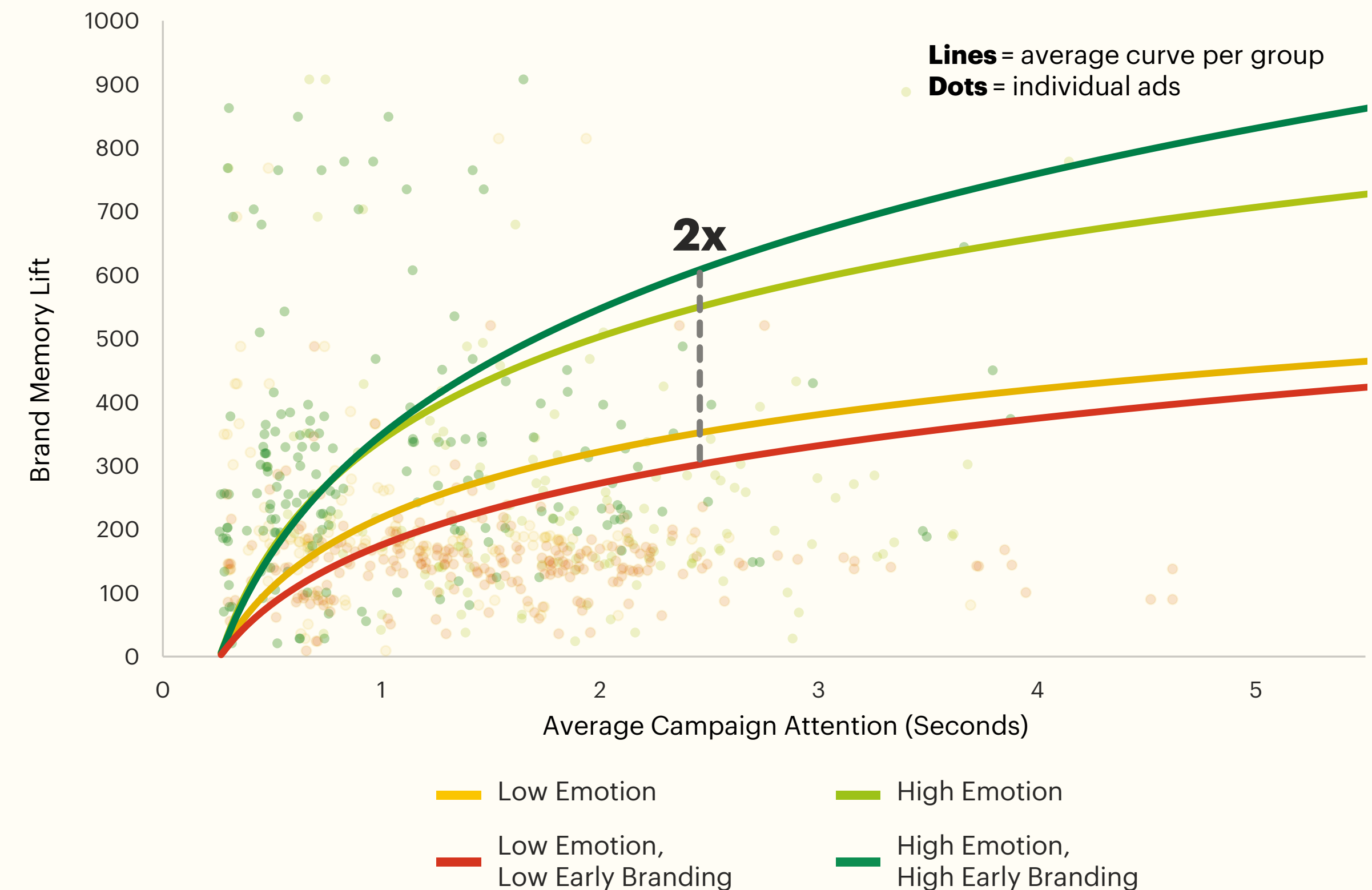
On short-form, when Emotion (Star Rating) is low, extra attention adds relatively little Brand Memory Lift. When Emotion is high, the same attention works harder. Add Early Branding, and the return rises again. The ad leaves people feeling good and the brand gets the credit.

That is Compound Equity: the same attention creates more brand memory when it carries stronger Emotion and better Early Branding.

AT ANY ATTENTION LEVEL, YOU CAN **DOUBLE** BRAND IMPACT WITH CREATIVE QUALITY.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT PER SECOND OF ATTENTION

Measured & Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: Cumulative Brand Memory Lift (indexed) modeled across 659 paid TikTok ads spanning 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), using TikTok measured Brand Lift Studies and modeled brand lift from System1 data. Lines show the modeled brand memory curve for each group; dots are the underlying ads. Low/High Emotion split on System1 Star Rating at the median; Low/High Early Branding split on System1 Fast Fluency at the median, High/Low Early Branding lines are sub-cohorts of High/Low Emotion. Low Emotion n=344, High Emotion n=315, High Emotion + High Early Branding n=177, Low Emotion + Low Early Branding n=235. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

EMOTION DOUBLES BRAND MEMORY. EARLY BRANDING TRIPLES IT.

#CREATIVEQUALITY

Creative Quality (Emotion + Early Branding) has two jobs to drive Brand Memory.

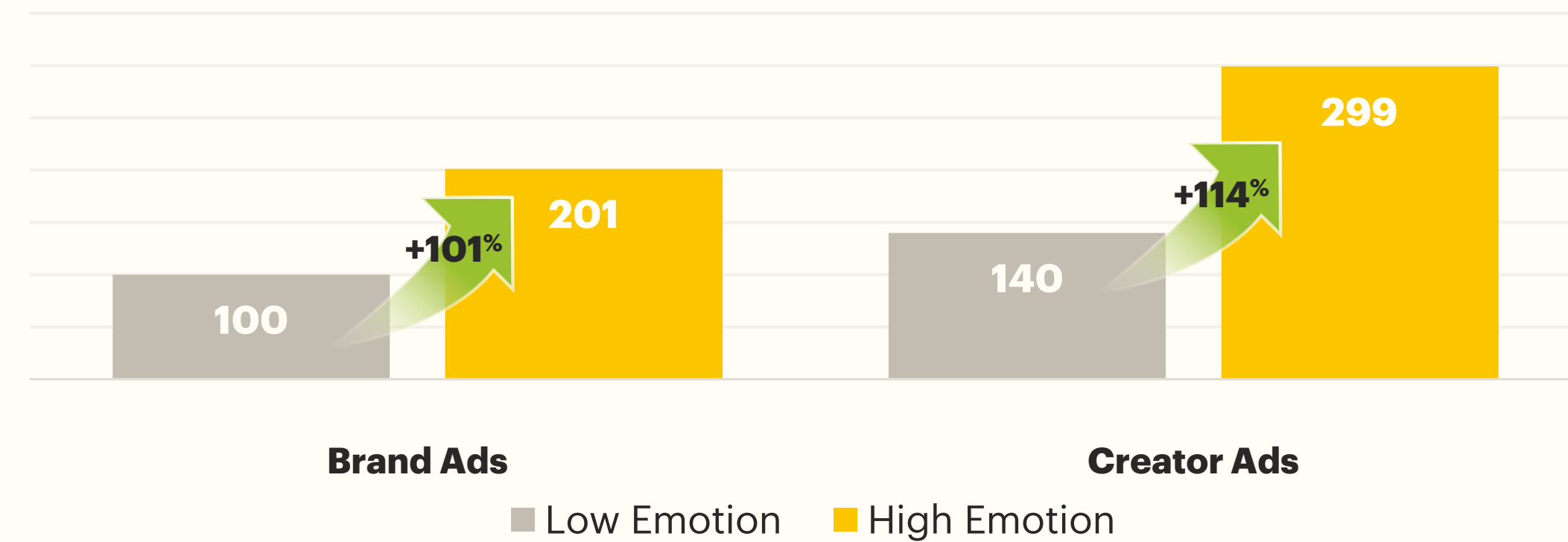
First, the ad has to make people feel something. High-Emotion (High Star Rating) creator ads deliver more than double the Brand Memory Lift of low-emotion ones.

But, if your ad is not branded, it's not an ad. The brand has to show up early enough to own that feeling. This is where most creator ads slip: the brand lands late, or not at all. Because so many start this low, getting it right pays off the most. Strong Early Branding nearly triples Brand Memory Lift.

You need both. Emotion counts for the most, but Early Branding is the quickest win for creators, because most of them start so low on it.

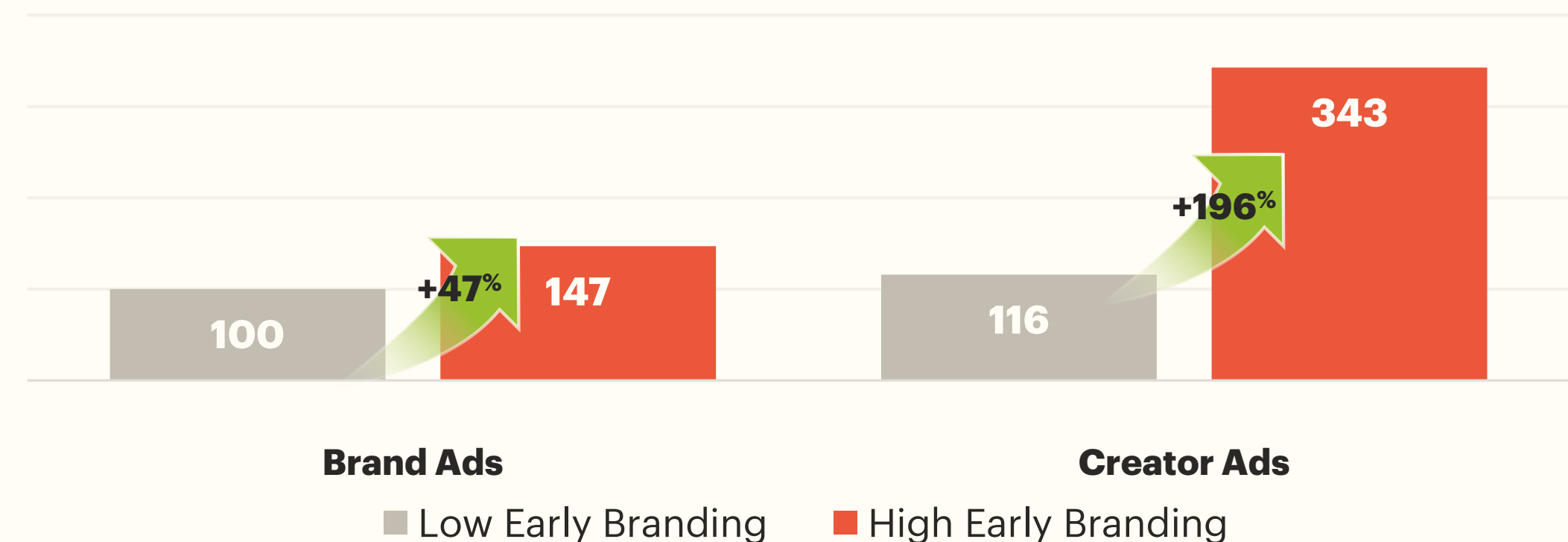
BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Measured Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Measured Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 337 campaigns with measured Brand Memory Lift; 195 brand-made and 142 creator campaigns. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1. From eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico). High/low Star Rating = top vs bottom 20%. High/low two-second brand recognition = top vs bottom 20%.

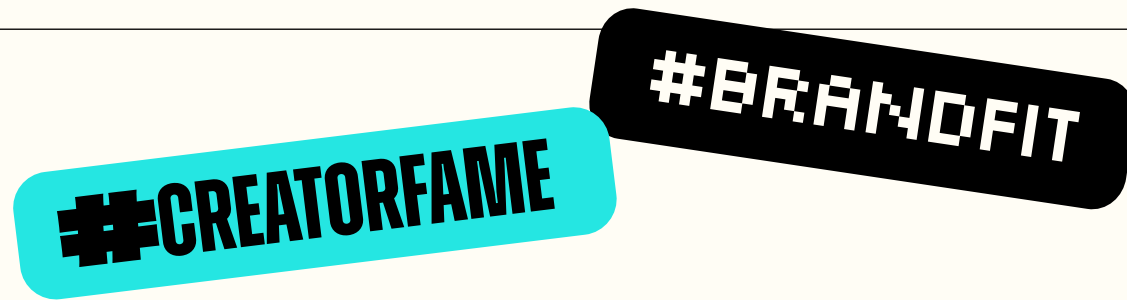
THE RIGHT CREATIVE NEEDS THE RIGHT CREATOR.

Creative Quality tells us whether the ad has the ingredients to build Brand Memory: emotion and Early Branding.

But creator advertising adds another layer. Brand ads must create their own recognizable brand worlds, but that judo flips when working with creators. In creator ads, that creator must make **your brand** a part of **their world**. The same ad can land differently depending on who creates it, what world it appears in, and whether the brand feels like it belongs there. That is why the next two levers that impact Brand Memory sit outside the ad itself: **Creator Fame and Brand Fit**. Both were measured as part of this study.

Creator Fame means recognizability, **not size**. It is not just follower count, it is whether the audience recognizes the creator, understands their world, or reads the cues that make the content familiar. **The point is the right kind of recognition, not the biggest creator.**

Brand Fit means belonging. It is whether the brand feels like it has a credible, congruent role in the creator's world. The brand does not feel at odds with the creator and the content they have built their audience with.

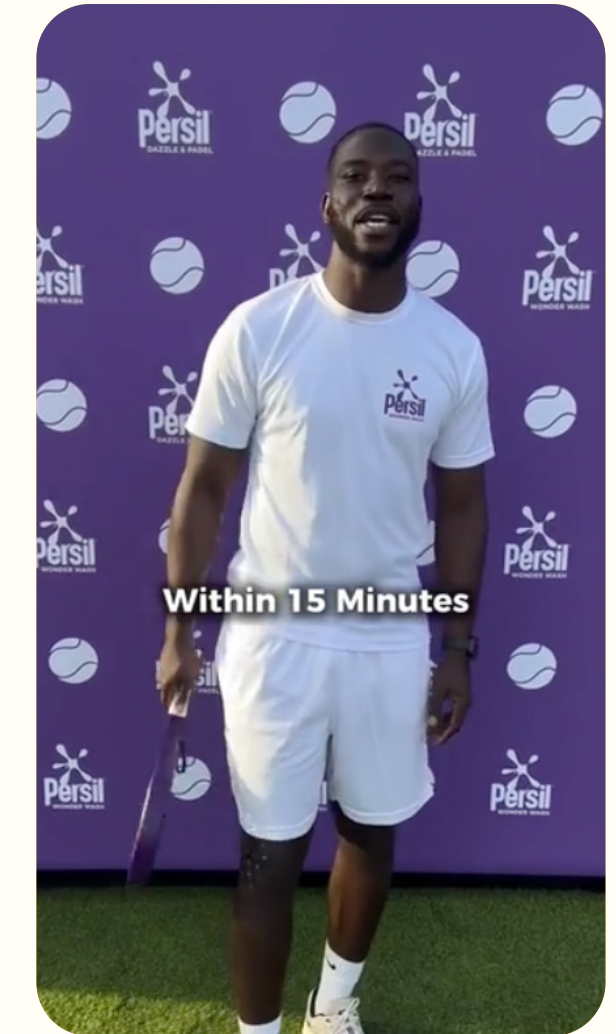


CREATOR FAME = RECOGNIZABLE CREATOR OR CREATOR WORLD

We asked: "Do you recognize this creator?"

When **Persil** teamed up with creator **Harry Pinero (@harrypinero)**, 22% of the audience recognized him in the ad.

[See Test Your Ad Social Report](#)



BRAND FIT = A NATURAL ROLE FOR THE BRAND WITHIN THAT WORLD

We asked: "How well suited was this creator for the brand they were advertising?"

The strongest Brand Fit in the data was **BlindTobes for Nationwide**, with 59% seeing the partnership as a good fit.

The creator gave the brand a natural role: showing the value of face-to-face banking, accessibility and being properly supported in branch when you're a blind person.

[See Test Your Ad Social Report](#)



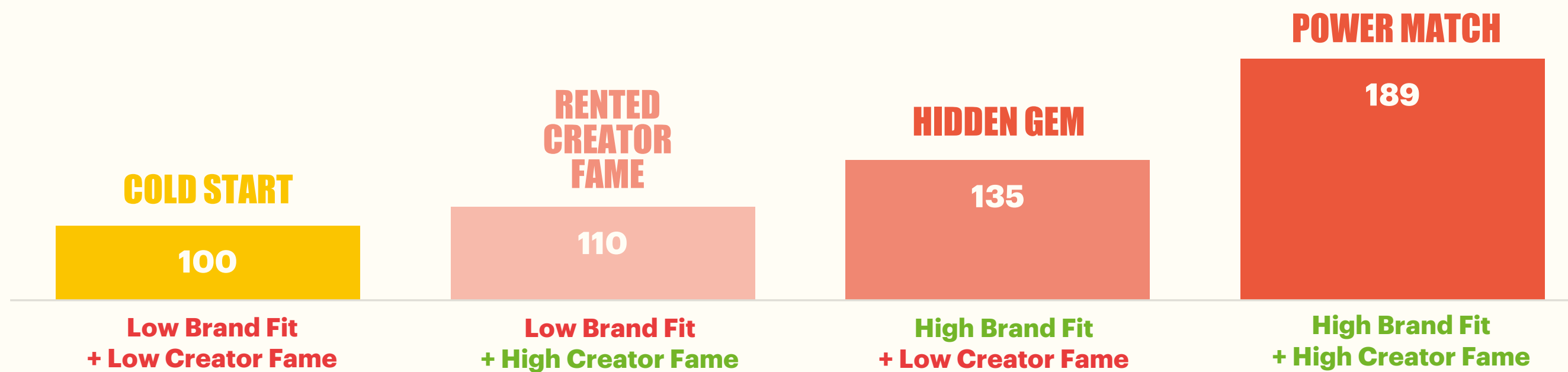
BRAND FIT BEATS CREATOR FAME. TOGETHER THEY DOUBLE BRAND MEMORY.

Both Creator Fame (the right kind of recognition, not simply the biggest creator) and Brand Fit have a positive relationship with Brand Memory Lift, but if brands need to prioritize one, Brand Fit proves to be more important.

However, the real magic happens when creator ads deliver on both fronts, a recognizable creator that is perceived to be a good fit for the brand nearly doubles Brand Memory Lift versus low Creator Fame and Brand Fit.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 239 creator ads with follower-size data. Modeled Brand Memory Lift at ad level from System1 Test Your Ad Social data among 35,850 TikTok users, split by above/below average Brand Fit and above/below average Creator Fame. Creator Fame measured through creator recognition: "Do you recognize this creator/influencer/celebrity?" Brand Fit measured through top-2-box agreement with: "How well suited was this creator/influencer/celebrity for the brand they were advertising?"

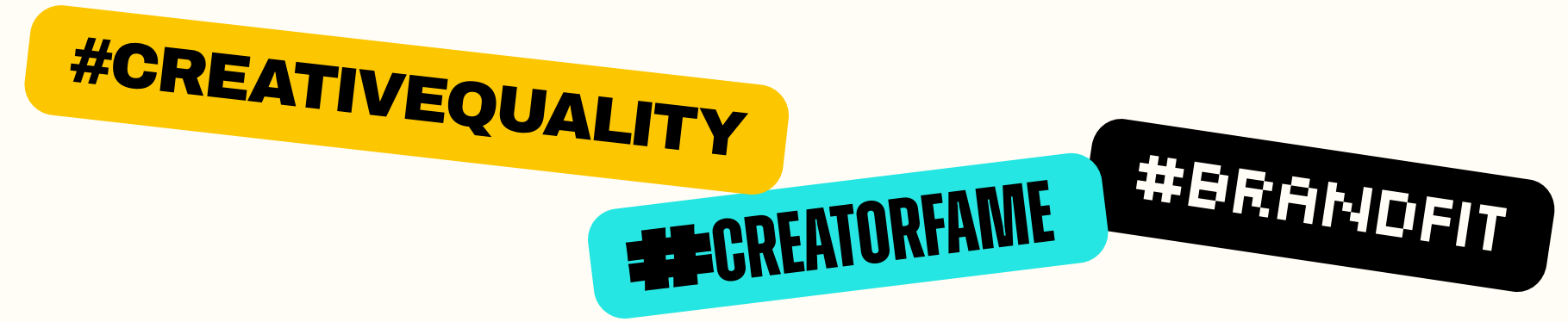
#CREATORFAME #BRANDFIT



POWER MATCH: Peroni 0.0% partnered with **Olly Bowman (@mrmelk)**, a recognizable creator known for being sober.

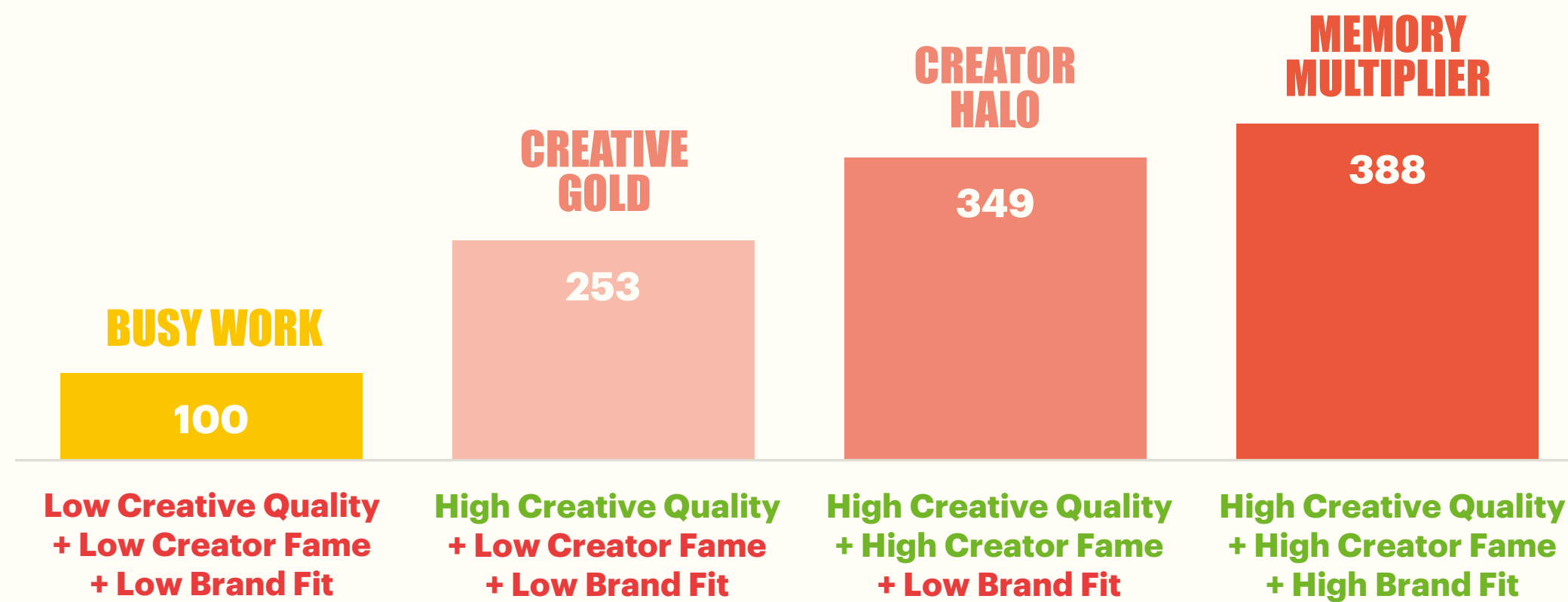
[See Test Your Ad Social Report](#)

RIGHT CREATOR + RIGHT CREATIVE QUADRUPLES BRAND MEMORY



BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Creative Quality on its own already transforms the outcome. Creator ads with high Creative Quality deliver well over twice the Brand Memory Lift of weaker ads.

Add a recognizable creator and the return climbs further. A creator the audience knows, or quickly understands, multiplies the power of Creative Quality.

Ensure that recognizable creator is a good Brand Fit for your audience as well, and the effect is bigger again.

Ultimately, when brands get all three of these levers right (Creative Quality, Creator Fame and Brand Fit) Brand Memory Lift rises by almost 4x.

Better creator effectiveness does not come from one lever alone. It comes from stacking the right creative with the right creator.

Base for this analysis: 239 creator ads with follower-size data. Modeled Brand Memory Lift at ad level from System1 Test Your Ad Social data among 35,850 TikTok users. Creator Fame and Brand Fit split by above/below average. High Creative Quality defined as top 20% Star Rating and top 20% two-second brand recognition; low Creative Quality defined as bottom 20% Star Rating and bottom 20% two-second brand recognition.

PART **2** TAKEAWAYS

WHAT BUILDS BRAND MEMORY

CREATIVE QUALITY EXPLAINS BRAND MEMORY.

Creator ads should be judged on whether they create emotion and land the brand early. Together, those two signals explain Brand Memory Lift far better than engagement. High Creative Quality more than doubles Brand Memory and compounds the memories built from every second of attention.

1

CREATOR FAME AND BRAND FIT DOUBLE BRAND MEMORY.

Creator Fame is recognizability: whether the audience recognizes the creator or the world they occupy, not just follower count. Brand Fit is belonging: whether the brand has a credible, natural role in that world. Both lift Brand Memory, and if you have to prioritize one, prioritize Brand Fit. The strongest result comes when both are high.

2

QUADRUPLE BRAND MEMORY WITH GREAT CREATIVE AND THE RIGHT CREATOR.

The big finding is what happens when the right creator ad meets the right creator. High Creative Quality, high Creator Fame and high Brand Fit lift Brand Memory to almost four times the weak baseline. That is the new creator effectiveness model: make people feel something, make sure the brand owns it, then choose the creator who helps the memory travel.

3

PART 3

#HOWTOPLAN

HOW TO PLAN

BUILD CREATOR FAME AND BRAND FIT IN THE STRATEGY. BUILD CREATIVE QUALITY IN THE BRIEF.

The evidence so far gives us a simple planning problem.

Creator ads build more Brand Memory Lift when three things come together: Creator Fame, Brand Fit and Creative Quality. Creator Fame gives the creator ad a head start, because the audience recognizes the creator or understands the world they are entering. Brand Fit makes the brand feel like it belongs in that world. Creative Quality then does the memory work: creating feeling and making sure the brand gets the credit.

Those levers are built in different places.

Creator Fame and Brand Fit are set up before the ad is made. They come from the need the brand chooses, the creator world it enters, the audience's recognition of that world, and whether the brand has a credible role inside it. Creative Quality is built in the creator ad itself. The brief has to make the ad entertaining enough to be felt, distinctive enough to be attributed to the brand, and native enough to still feel like the creator.

That is the job of Part 3: use strategy to set up the right creator conditions, then use the brief to turn those conditions into branded memory. Brand Memory Lift is highest when you get both right.



THE CREATOR EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

Part 2 taught us that we need Creative Quality, fame and Brand Fit to maximize brand memory gains.

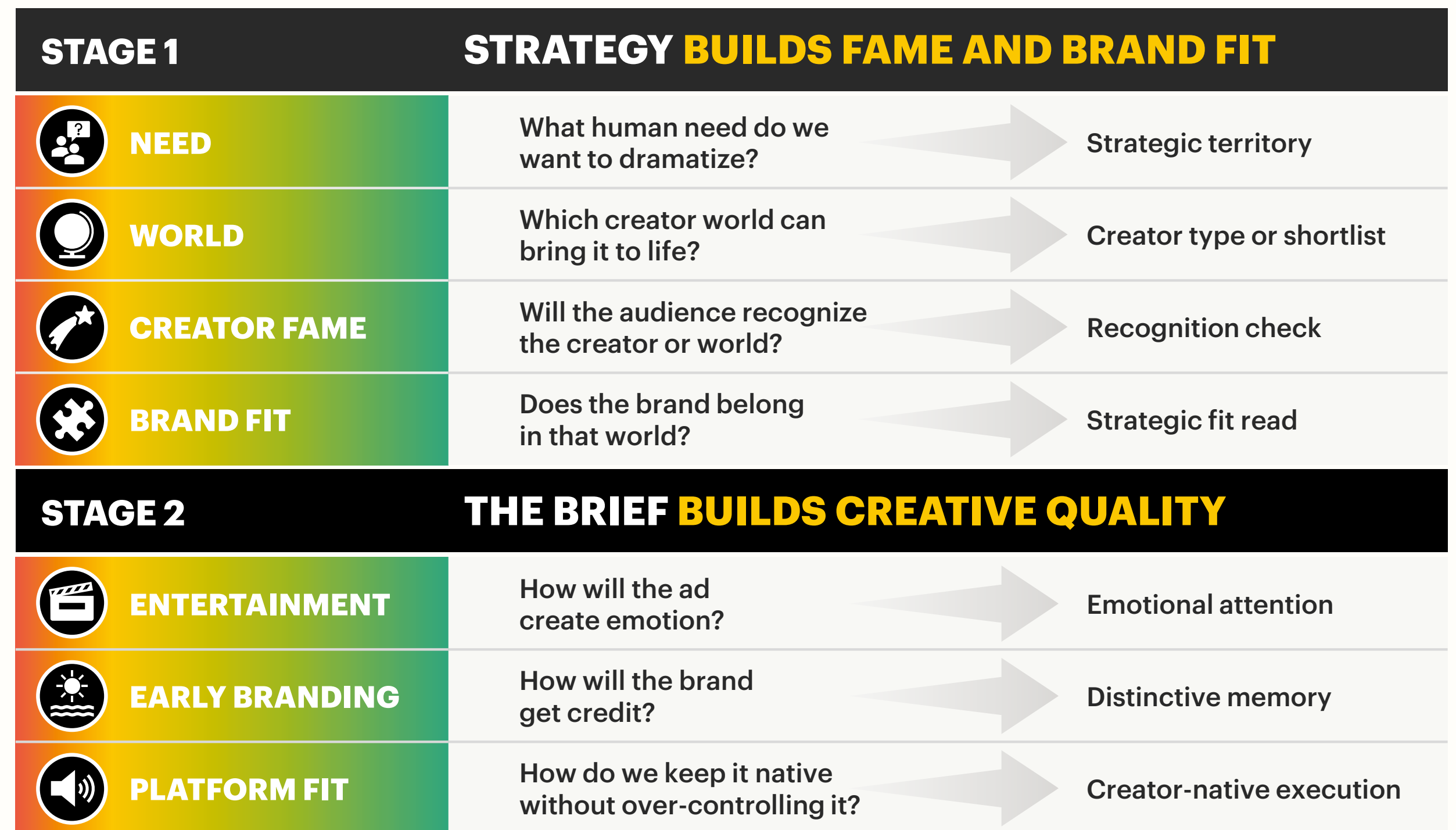
WHEN IT COMES TO PLANNING, THINK OF IT IN TWO STAGES:

- 1 - STRATEGY BUILDS FAME AND BRAND FIT.**
- 2 - THE BRIEF BUILDS CREATIVE QUALITY.**

Fame and Brand Fit sit in the strategy. A brand has to choose the human need it wants to dramatize, find the creator world where that need can happen naturally, check whether the audience recognizes the creator or world, and make sure the brand has a role that feels credible inside it.

Creative Quality sits in the brief. The creator ad has to create emotion through entertainment, land the brand early, and stay native to the creator's world without being over-controlled.

This framework is the map for the chapter. The first half is about setting the conditions for fame and Brand Fit. The second half is about briefing the creator ad that turns those conditions into Creative Quality.



STAGE 1: STRATEGY BUILDS CREATOR FRAME AND BRAND FIT

#STRATEGY



CATEGORY NEED BEFORE CREATOR NAME.

The first creator decision is the need the brand wants to dramatize.

A product benefit matters, but it rarely gives a creator enough to work with on its own. In the feed, a benefit has to become a human moment: a craving, a confidence boost, a reset, a social occasion, a sense of security, a small treat, a problem solved.

Category need analysis gives marketers a better starting point. It shows which human moments are most likely to lift attention and emotion in a category, and how heavily those moments are already being used.

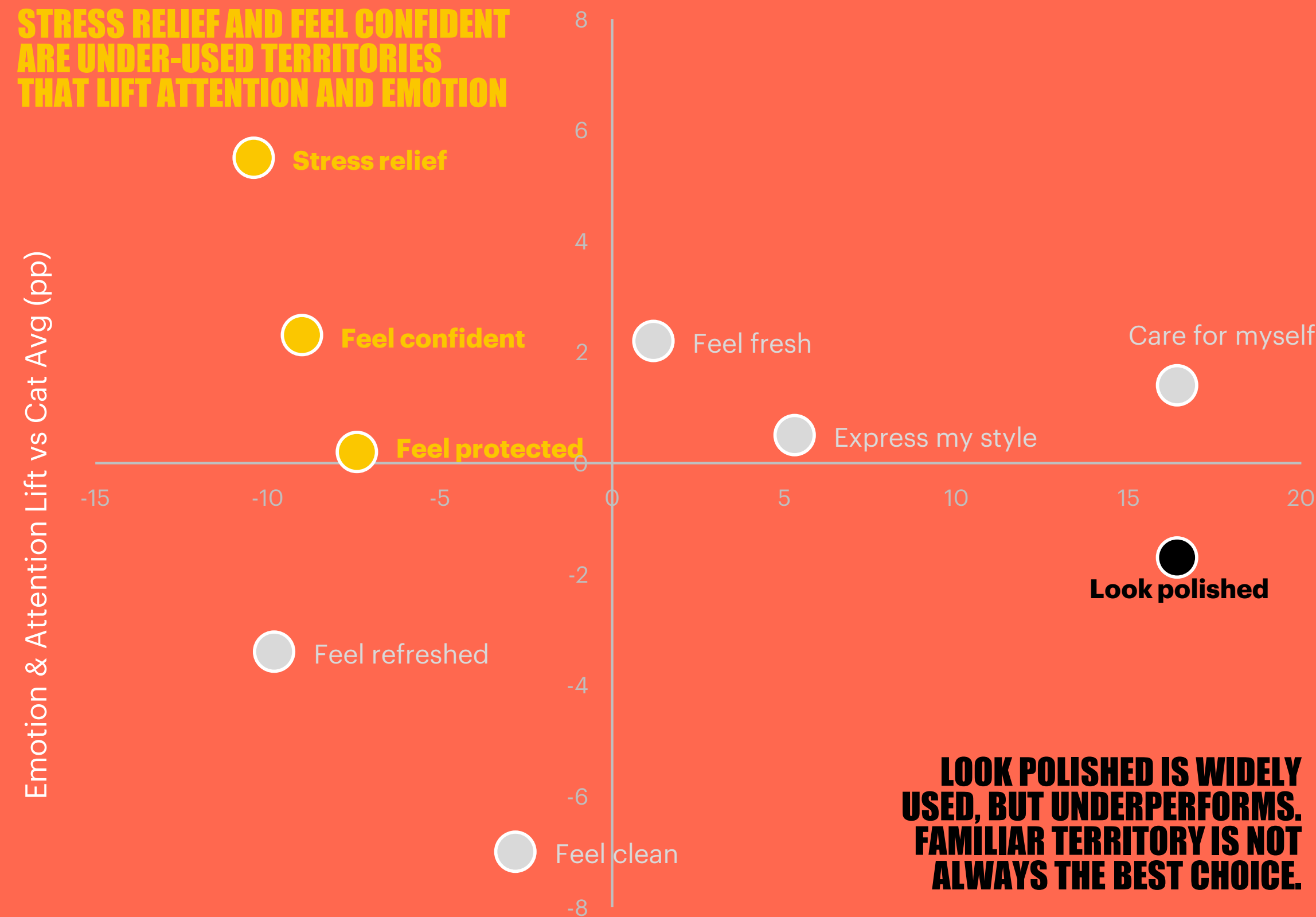
Here's an example.

CATEGORY NEED ANALYSIS CAN HELP IDENTIFY WHICH HUMAN MOMENTS LIFT ATTENTION AND EMOTION MOST IN A GIVEN CATEGORY.

#STRATEGY

THE STRONGEST CREATOR TERRITORY IS NOT ALWAYS THE ONE THE CATEGORY USES MOST.

STRESS RELIEF AND FEEL CONFIDENT ARE UNDER-USED TERRITORIES THAT LIFT ATTENTION AND EMOTION



LOOK POLISHED IS WIDELY USED, BUT UNDERPERFORMS. FAMILIAR TERRITORY IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST CHOICE.

This map shows which needs in Beauty: Skin, Body & Hair lift attention and emotion, and how often the category already uses them.

Stress Relief is the standout. It is used less than the category average, yet delivers the strongest lift in attention and emotion.

Feel confident is also under-used and positive, making it another attractive territory for creator work.

Care for myself is already heavily used, but still performs well. That makes it useful, although more crowded. Look polished is the cautionary tale: the category uses it a lot, but it drags performance below the category average.

This is why creator strategy should start before the shortlist. Choose the need with the best chance of creating feeling, then find the creator world that can bring it to life.

Base for this analysis: System1 Test Your Ad, UK market, Beauty: Skin, Body & Hair category, n=2,205 respondents, 22 ads, 9 needs tested. Respondents were tagged "with" a need when their free-text associations after viewing an ad mapped to that need. Attention & Emotion (A&E) = System1 composite of % watched and emotional response, scored 0-100. Lift = percentage points above (+) or below (-) the category average for ads featuring this need. Use = % of category ads mentioning this need.

CATEGORY NEED DEFINES CREATOR WORLD

Once the need is clear, creator selection becomes a different task.

The brand is no longer looking for a broad category creator. It is looking for the creator world where the need already makes sense.

Stress relief points toward creators whose content is built around decompression: evening routines, everything showers, bath rituals, ASMR, calm skincare, hair-wash days and end-of-day resets. The product has to feel like part of the release, not a beauty claim dropped into the middle of a routine.

Feel confident takes the search somewhere else: GRWM, transformation, before-and-after, going out, date night, big moments. Care for myself is slower and more reflective: maintenance, self-care, recovery, taking time back.

This is the practical value of the needs data. It changes the search brief before the creator shortlist is built.

The need defines the world. The world narrows the shortlist. By the time follower count enters the conversation, the brand should already know what kind of creator world it is looking for.

#STRATEGY

THE NEED DEFINES THE CREATOR WORLD. THE CREATOR WORLD NARROWS THE SHORTLIST.

NEED	WHAT THE CREATOR NEEDS TO DRAMATIZE	CREATOR WORLDS TO LOOK FOR
Stress relief	Product as a moment of release, calm or decompression	Evening routine, everything shower, bath ritual, ASMR/self-care reset, hair-wash day, end-of-day wind-down
Feel confident	Product changes how someone feels in the moment	GRWM, transformation, before/after, big meeting, date night, going out
Feel fresh	Product creates freshness, lightness or social comfort	Morning reset, daily routine, scent, clean hair/skin, social readiness
Care for myself	Product as maintenance, care or self-respect	Slow routine, self-care creator, wellness-adjacent, "taking time for me"
Express my style	Product as identity or taste	Fashion crossover, personal style, makeup looks, mood-led creators
Look polished	Product creates a finished look	Only use if reframed into confidence, style or care

PRIORITIZE BRAND FIT OVER CREATOR FAME

A recognizable creator gives a creator ad a head start. When people know the creator, or quickly understand their world, the cognitive obstacles an ad needs to overcome to start driving attention, emotion and ultimately brand memories are lower.

But Brand Fit is an even more powerful indicator of effectiveness. Brand Fit means the product has a natural place in the creator's world. The brand does not feel forced into the content. The moment makes sense. And as a result, emotion and attention rise roughly twice as much compared to Creator Fame alone.

As outlined in Part 2, the real unlock to Brand Memory Lift is combining both. However, if you have to prioritize, protect Brand Fit. A smaller creator in the right world, with a product role that feels natural, is a stronger bet than a bigger creator where the brand feels bolted on.



#BRANDFIT

#STRATEGY

#CREATORFAME

FAME AND BRAND FIT BOTH DRIVE MORE EMOTION AND ATTENTION. BRAND FIT WORKS HARDER.

CREATOR ADS WITH ABOVE AVERAGE CREATOR FAME DRIVE (VS BELOW AVERAGE)

★ +23% EMOTION
📍 +10% ATTENTION

CREATOR ADS WITH ABOVE AVERAGE BRAND FIT DRIVE (VS BELOW AVERAGE)

★ +58% EMOTION
📍 +17% ATTENTION

Base for this analysis: 239 creator ads measured via System1 Test Your Ad Social among 35,850 TikTok users. Creator Fame and Brand Fit split by above/below average. Emotion = System1 Star Rating; Attention = seconds watched. Creator Fame measured through creator recognition: "Do you recognize this creator/influencer/celebrity?" Brand Fit measured through top-2-box agreement with: "How well suited was this creator/influencer/celebrity for the brand they were advertising?"

THERE'S MORE TO CREATOR CHOICE THAN FOLLOWER COUNT.

By this point, the strategy has chosen the need the brand wants to dramatize and the creator world that can carry it.

Now comes the Creator Fame decision, which has shifted in recent years. As platforms increasingly embrace the content graph over the social graph, follower count is no longer the proxy for Creator Fame and distribution that it once was. The more important question brands must ask is whether their audience will recognize the creator. Will they understand the creator's world quickly enough for the ad to land?

The gap is sharper than follower counts suggest. Micro and Mid creators are mostly concentrated in the lowest recognition band, yet a handful are recognized by close to a third of their audience. Macro creators improve the odds but still carry a large low-recognition tail, and even among Celebrities, recognition should be checked rather than assumed.

That does not mean smaller creators cannot build Creator Fame effects. A creator can be recognizable because of who they are, but also because of the world they occupy: the format, need state, behavior or community the audience already understands. So work with creators for what they are known for, in the settings their content already lives in.

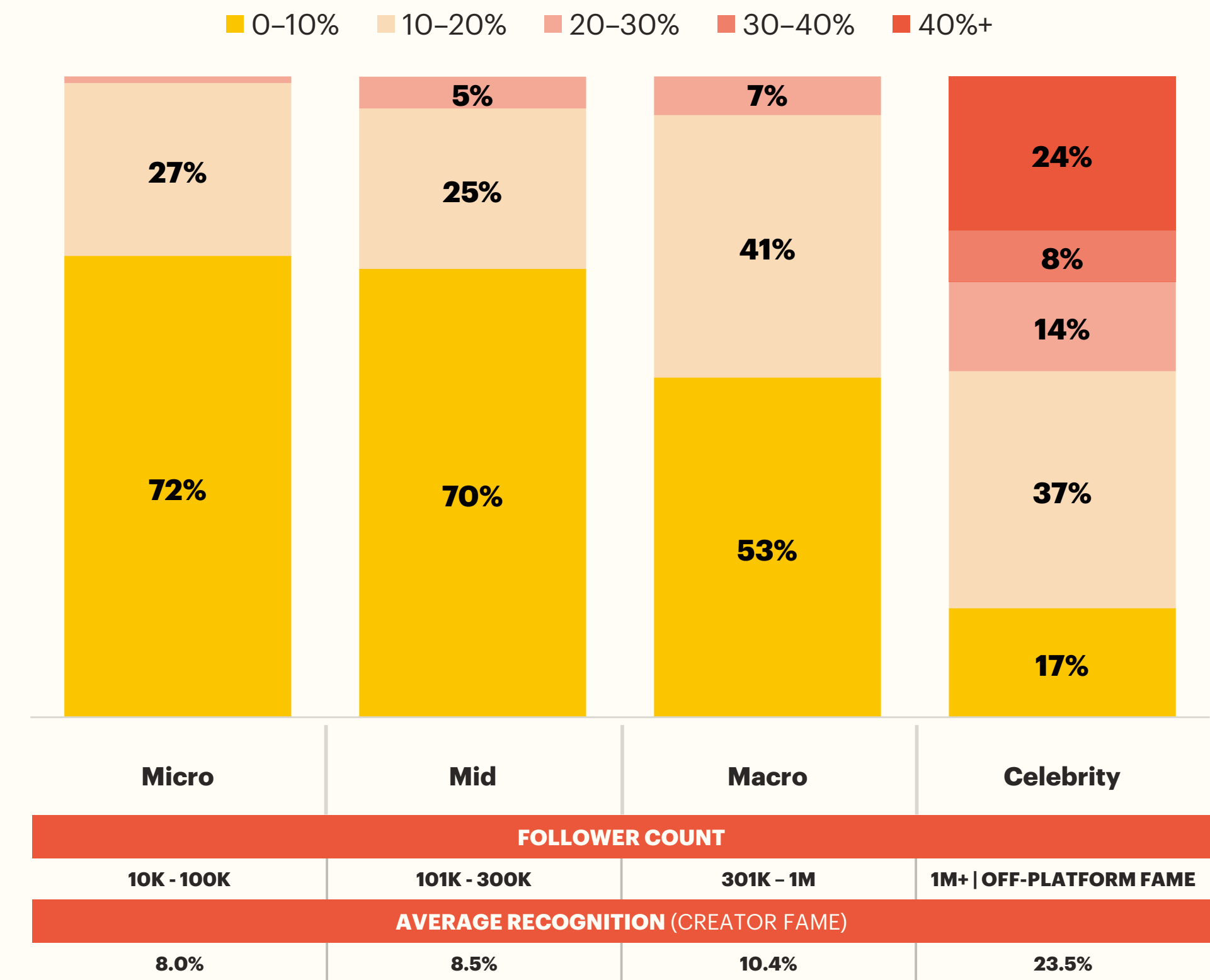
Lean in when a creator has live viral content; the recognition boost is real and usually worth paying more for. And remember, the only audience that matters is your brand's audience. Check they recognize the creator before betting on fame. Need and world come before creator size: with both right, Creator Fame has more ways to work.

DISTRIBUTION OF CREATOR RECOGNITION BY CREATOR FOLLOWER COUNT



PERCENTAGE OF AUDIENCE WHO RECOGNIZED THE CREATOR

per Creator Follower Size



Base for this analysis: 239 creator ads with follower-size data. Modeled Brand Memory Lift at ad level from System1 Test Your Ad Social data among 35,850 TikTok users, split by creator size. Creator size based on follower count on the platform the ad ran on: Micro 10k-100k, Mid 101k-300k, Macro 301k-1M, Celebrity over 1M or public figures with off-platform Creator Fame. Creator Fame measured through creator recognition: "Do you recognize this creator/influencer/celebrity?"

STAGE 2: THE BRIEF BUILDS CREATIVE QUALITY



#BRIEF

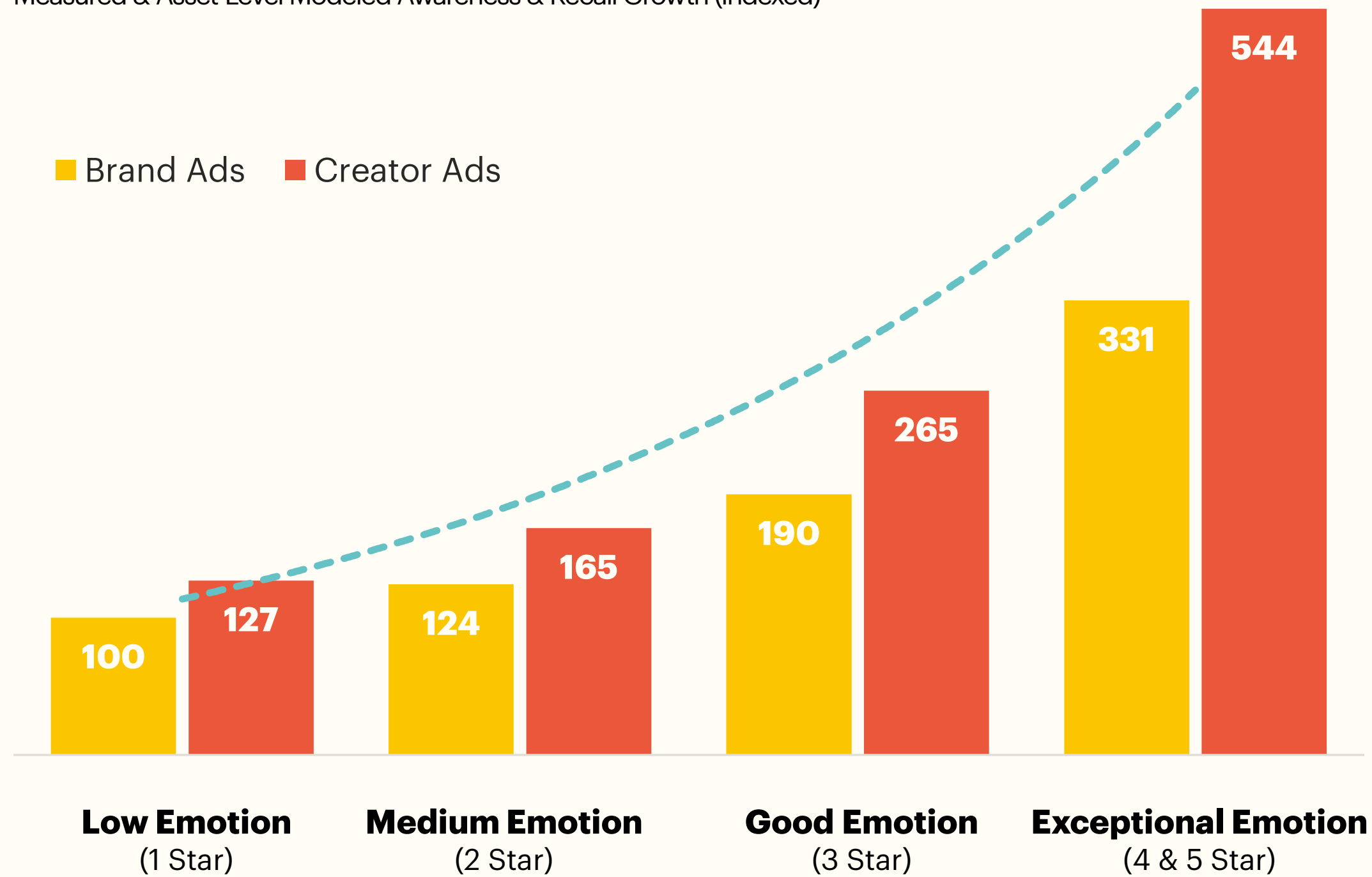
EMOTION COMPOUNDS BRAND MEMORY.

#CREATIVEQUALITY

#BRIEF

BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Measured & Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



The more feeling a creator ad creates, the more Brand Memory it builds.

High-Star creator ads deliver more than four times the Brand Memory Lift of low-Star creator ads, and the gains compound as the ads get stronger.

Brand ads follow the same direction, but the curve is much steeper for creators. That is what makes emotion such an important part of creator effectiveness.

Nail emotion, and creator ads will see outsized returns.

So the next question is not whether emotion matters but how can you increase your chances that your creator ads generate it consistently.

That is where entertainment comes in.

Base for this analysis: Cumulative Brand Memory Lift (indexed) modeled across 659 paid TikTok ads spanning 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), using TikTok measured Brand Lift Studies and modeled brand lift from System1 data. Lines show the modeled brand memory curve for each group; dots are the underlying ads. Low/High Emotion split on System1 Star Rating at the median; Low/High Early Branding split on System1 Fast Fluency at the median, High/Low Early Branding lines are sub-cohorts of High/Low Emotion. Low Emotion n=344, High Emotion n=315, High Emotion + High Early Branding n=177, Low Emotion + Low Early Branding n=235. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

ENTERTAINMENT EARNS EMOTION & ATTENTION.

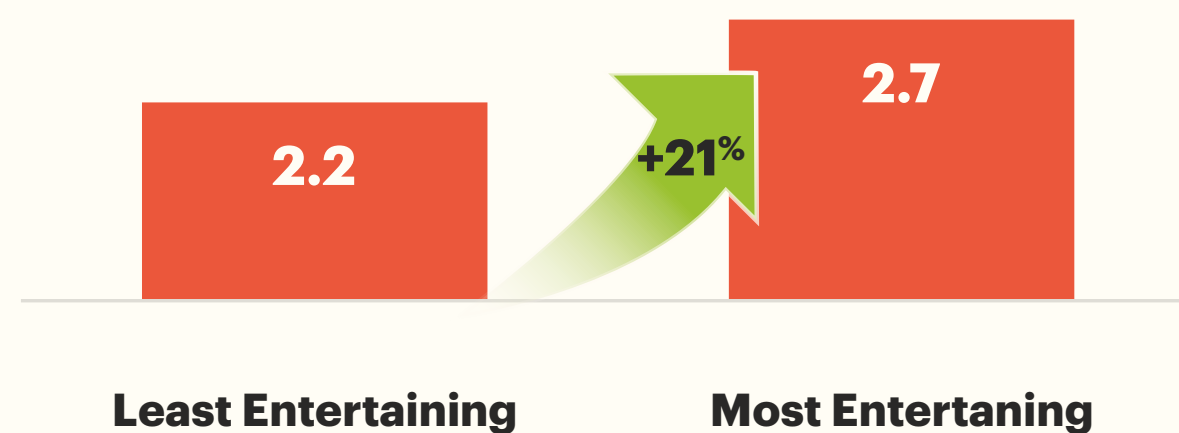
Entertainment is how creators earn emotional attention: by making work that’s watchable and felt. The most entertaining ads score higher on emotion (2.7 vs 2.2 stars) and earn 82% more attention in the first six seconds.

But how do we define entertainment?

We use System1’s Chief Creative Officer Orlando Wood’s **Showmanship** framework (Lemon, 2019; Look Out, 2021) which is the idea that an ad must put on a show rather than simply sell (salesmanship). In The Long and the Short (Form) of It, we identified the most common Showmanship features in short-form video (listed right) along with the most common Salesmanship features: someone talking directly to camera, split or divided screens, many words on screen, facts, figures and comparisons, told-me-to-do-something calls to action, shared useful information, lots of fast-cut scenes, and a focus on the product. We coded every creator ad in this study for their presence to find the most and least entertaining work.

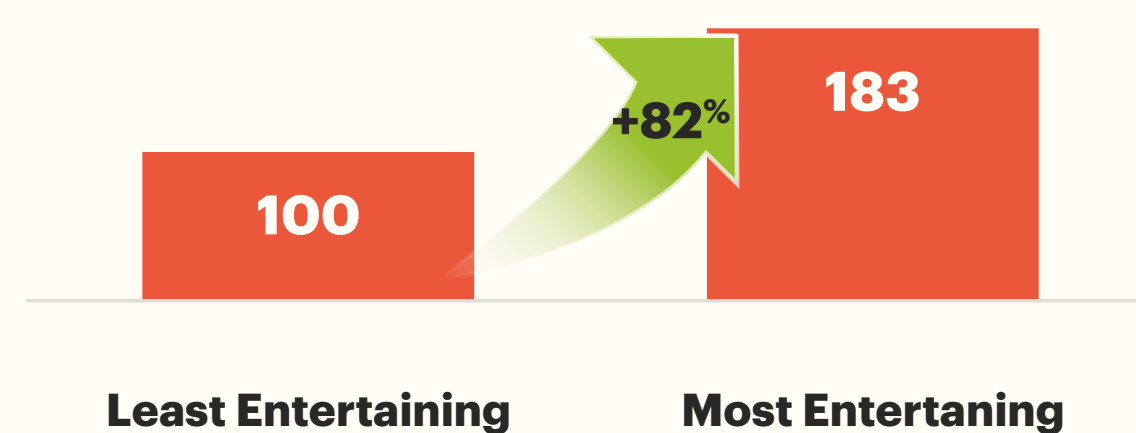
EMOTION

Star Rating



ATTENTION

Attention Seconds (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social, with 93,000 TikTok users. Attention = 6s VTR (Indexed).

SHOWMANSHIP CREATIVE FEATURES

Defined for short-form video

#BRIEF
#SHOWMANSHIP

- CHARACTERS ACTING
- A STORY UNFOLDING
- ENTERTAINING LANGUAGE
- SPONTANEOUS CHANGES IN FACIAL EXPRESSIONS
- A RECOGNIZABLE PLACE
- A HUMMABLE TUNE
- PEOPLE INTERACTING
- A PAUSE OR A SOFT, HUSHED VOICE
- SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY

ENTERTAINMENT LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD ACROSS CREATOR SIZE

How entertaining an ad is, is a bigger predictor of whether a creator builds Brand Memory than creator size.

A Most-Entertaining Micro creator (201) sits in the same neighborhood as Macro (221) and Celebrity (202). Without entertainment, every tier clusters around 100, Micro, Mid, Macro, Celebrity, all roughly equal, all largely forgotten.

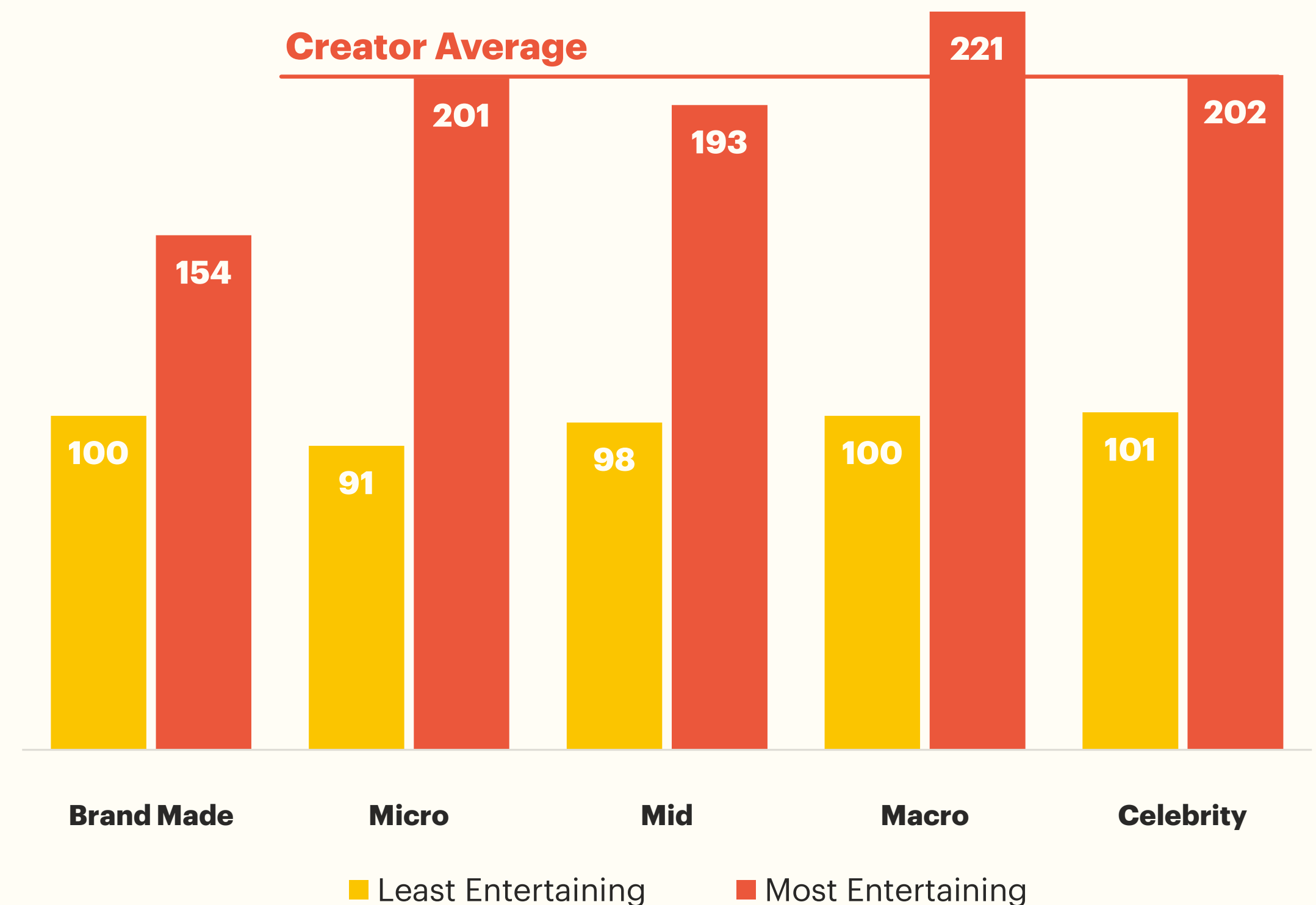
Regardless of what size creator you've chosen to work with, entertainment is a crucial part of any brief.

So what creative features should creators focus on?

#BRIEF
#SHOWMANSHIP

BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Measured & Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: Brand Memory Lift (indexed) modeled across 659 paid TikTok ads spanning 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), using TikTok measured Brand Lift Studies and modeled brand lift from System1 data. Split by above/below average number of Showmanship features present. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

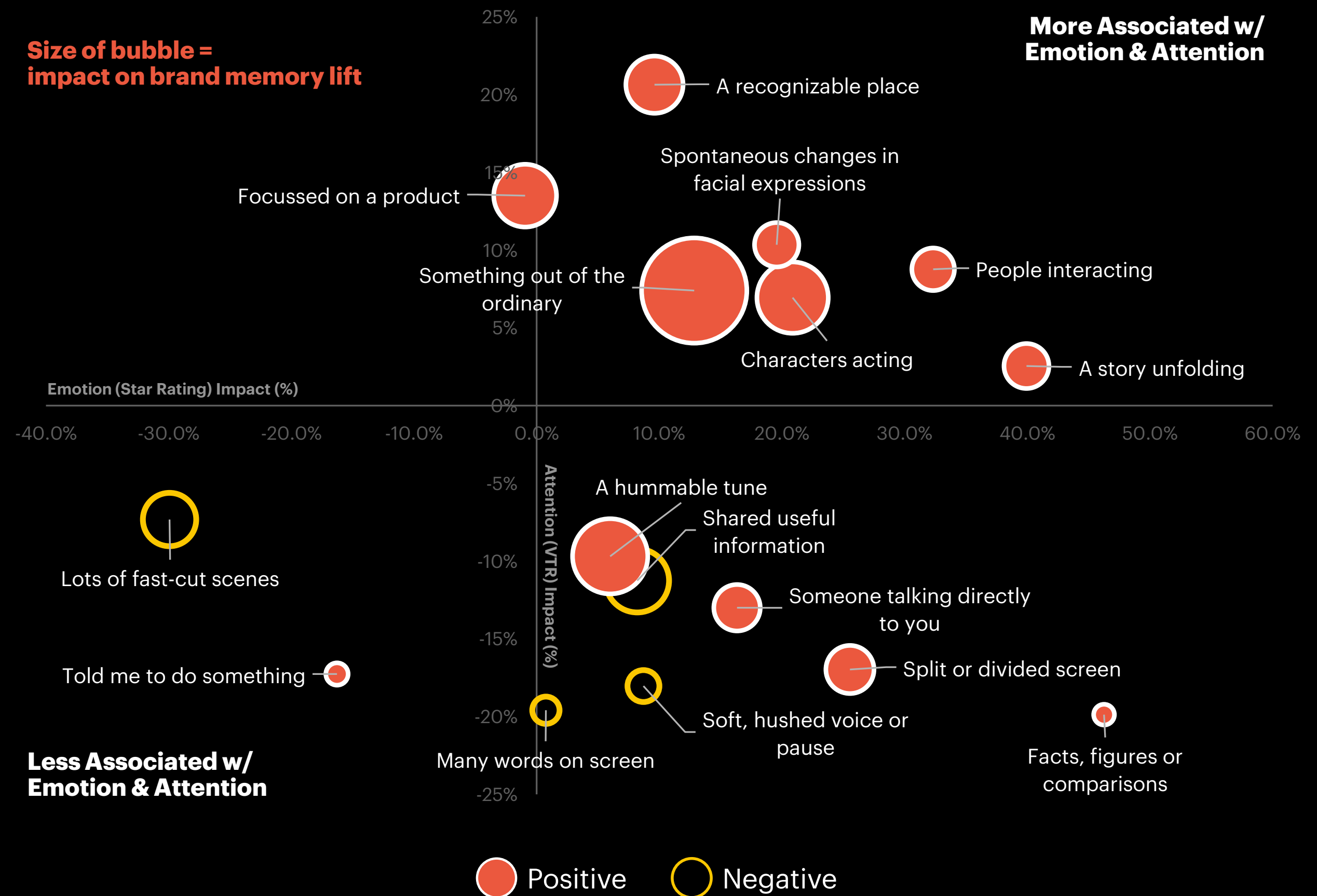
#SHOWMANSHIP #BRIEF

CREATORS MUST PUT ON A SHOW.

Showmanship makes creator ads work harder. Stories, characters, recognizable places and spontaneous expression pull attention, emotion and Brand Memory up together.

The biggest gain comes from **something out of the ordinary**. In a skippable feed, an ad that disrupts the pattern and stops the scroll makes audiences lean and be more likely to remember it.

On the other hand, salesmanship features cause more skipping, leave people feeling less and ultimately less likely to remember the ad.



Base for this analysis: 659 paid TikTok ads spanning 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico). Emotion = System1 Star Rating; Attention = seconds watched; Brand Memory Lift modeled from TikTok Brand Lift Studies and System1 data, where Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift weighted 2:1. Each bubble plots a Showmanship or Salesmanship feature's average impact on Emotion (x-axis) and Attention (y-axis) when present in the ad; bubble size = Brand Memory Lift impact, with pink positive and white negative.

#EARLYBRANDING #BRIEF

ALMOST HALF OF CREATOR ADS USE ZERO EARLY BRAND CUES.

The hard part is done. Earning enough emotional attention to be remembered by consumers. But memory without a brand attached doesn't build a brand. That's the job of distinctiveness, the cues that turn a memory into Brand Memory.

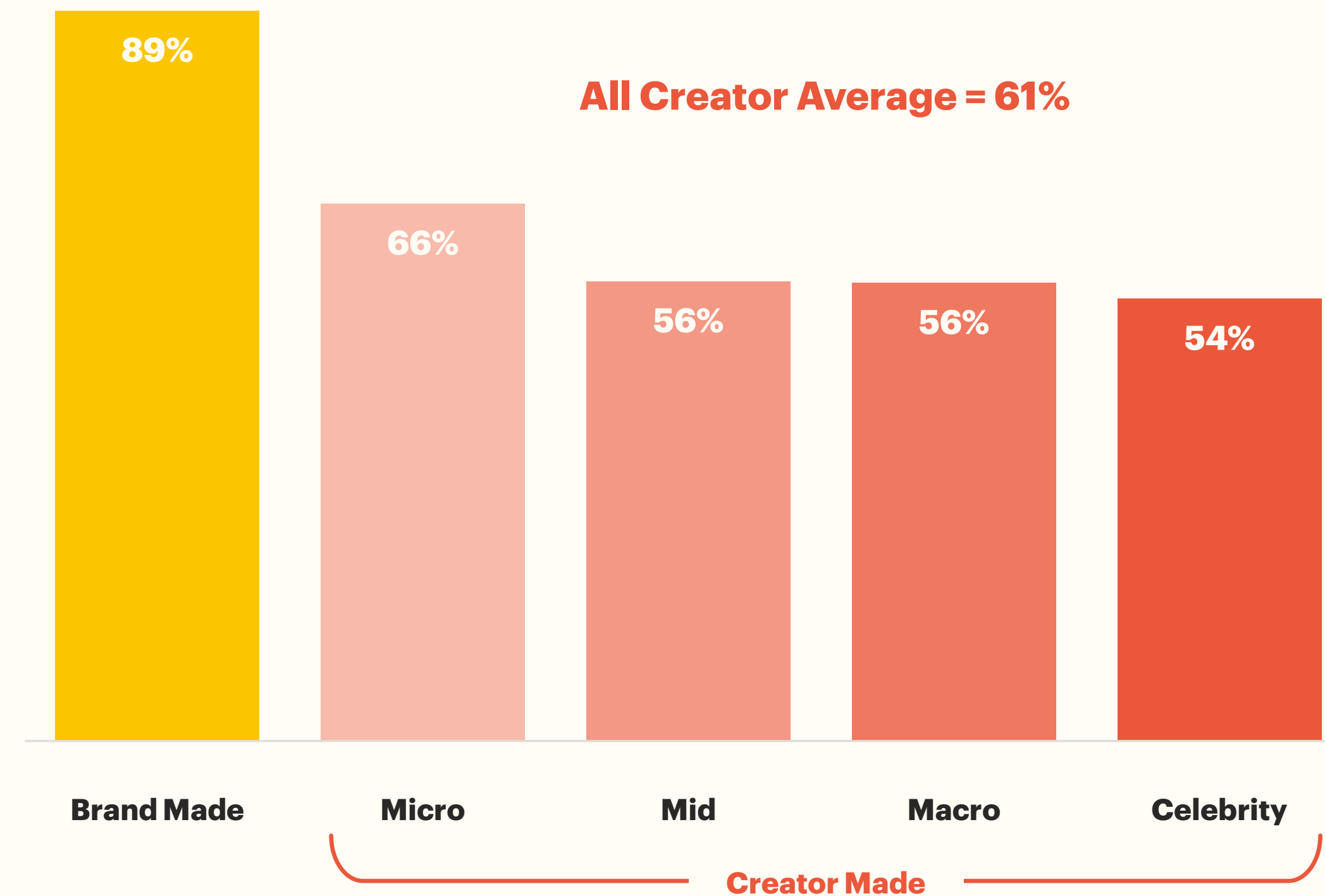
It's also where creators feel the most tension. Many avoid early or overt branding for fear of breaking the spell of attention they've worked to earn.

Across all creator work, only 61% include at least one brand cue in the first two seconds. That means nearly **4 in 10 creator ads do not brand early at all.**

The best creators understand it isn't a trade-off. They turn distinctive brand assets into the hook rather than fighting them.

The rest of this stage highlights how to most effectively leverage Distinctive Brand Assets (DBAs) within creator advertising.

% OF ADS WITH AT LEAST 1 BRAND CUE IN FIRST 2 SECONDS



Base for this analysis: 1,217 paid TikTok ads (620 creator and 597 brand-made) measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social among 182,550 TikTok users across 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico). Early branding measured as the number of brand cues present in the first two seconds of the ad.

#EARLYBRANDING #BRIEF

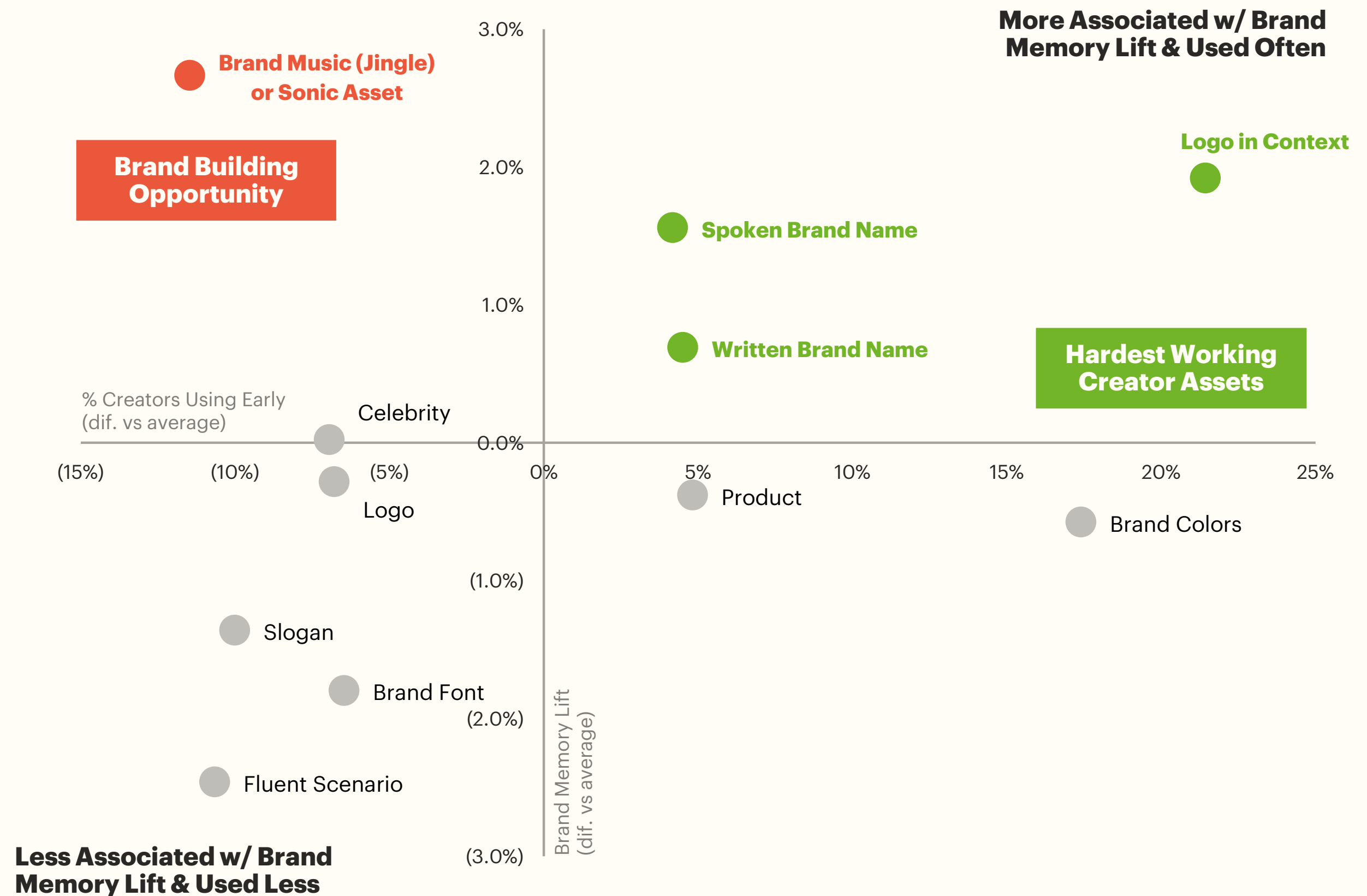
THE CREATOR DBA PLAYBOOK.

Four DBAs do the heavy lifting in the opening seconds. **Logo in context. Spoken brand name. Written brand name. Sonic assets.** Each lifts Brand Memory, and creators use them often. **Sound is the open goal.** Sonic assets deliver the highest memory lift of any cue yet fewer than 5% of creators use them early. The biggest opportunity in the data sits with the cue most often ignored.

Two cues are overused and don't pay back. Brand colors and product shots in the opening seconds are associated with lower Brand Memory Lift when they interrupt rather than belong. One principle ties them together: brand cues have to belong in the moment the creator is building. The ones that do, lift. The ones that interrupt, drag.

DISTINCTIVE ASSET BRAND MEMORY IMPACT

Impact when used in the first 2seconds vs % of creators using, vs average impact



Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social among 93,000 TikTok users across 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), with a mixture of measured and modeled Brand Memory Lift using TikTok Brand Lift Studies. Each value shown is the average impact on Brand Memory Lift when that asset is present in the first two seconds of the ad versus absent, indexed against the average across all asset types. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

#EARLYBRANDING #BRIEF

SAY IT. SHOW IT.

The simplest creator branding rule is also one of the strongest: **say it AND show it.**

Brands often treat early branding as a visual problem, and creators have followed suit.

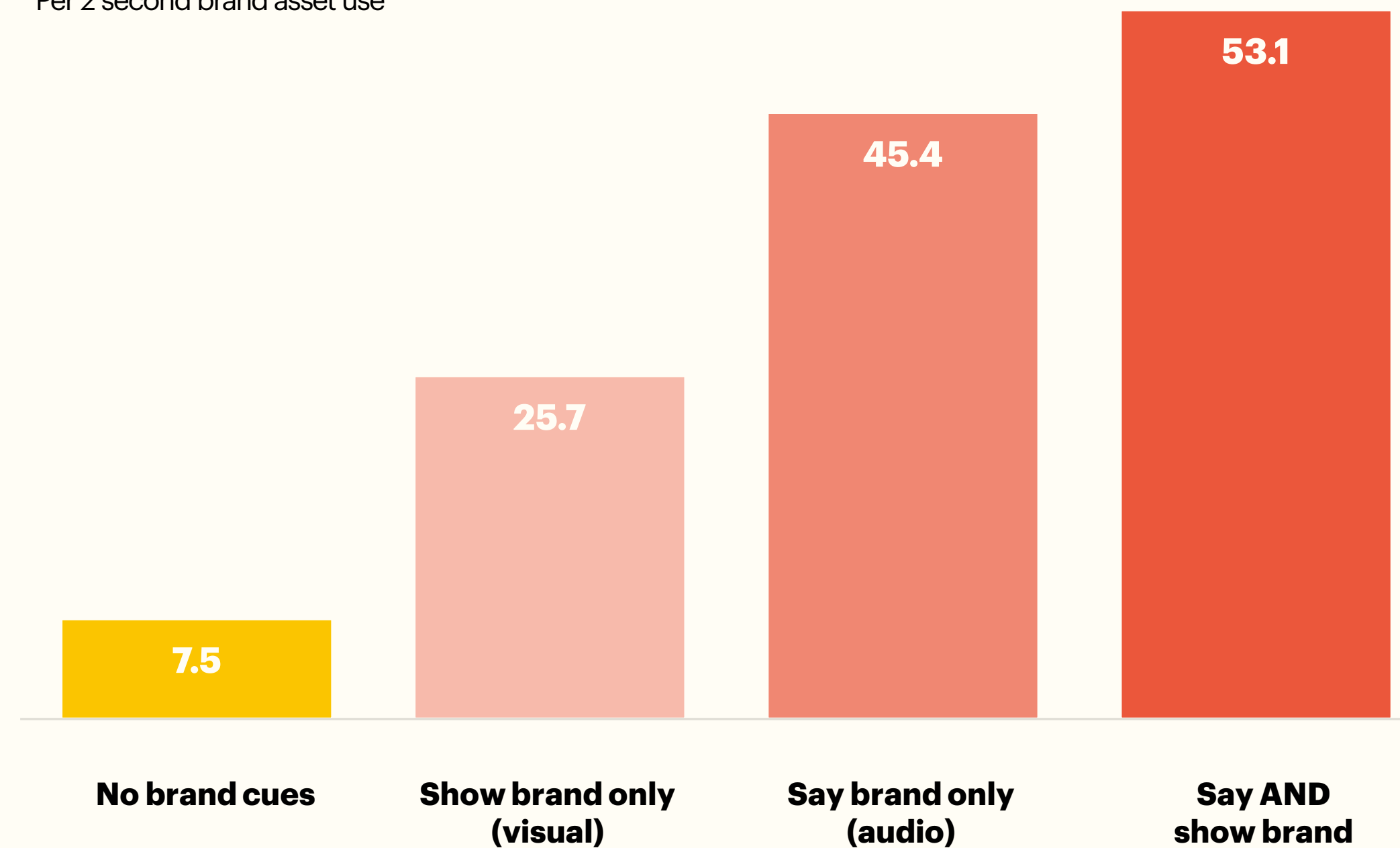
64% use early visual cues. Just 18% use early audio. Yet by using audio and visual DBAs together, you can drive 2x the early brand recognition of visual branding only.

In creator advertising, sound is half the job. A creator saying the brand name as part of the thought feels more native than a logo card. A sonic cue becomes part of the hook rather than a tax on attention.

One of the simplest wins in creator branding is also the most often missed: making sure both ears and eyes get the brand in the opening seconds.

EARLY BRAND RECOGNITION (%)

Per 2 second brand asset use



SAY IT **SHOW IT**

[See Test Your Ad Social Report](#)

Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social, with 93,000 TikTok users.

#EARLYBRANDING #BRIEF

FOUR IS THE MAGIC NUMBER.

Brand early does not mean brand everywhere.

The opening seconds need enough distinctive brand assets to make the advertiser recognizable. They also need to keep the content alive.

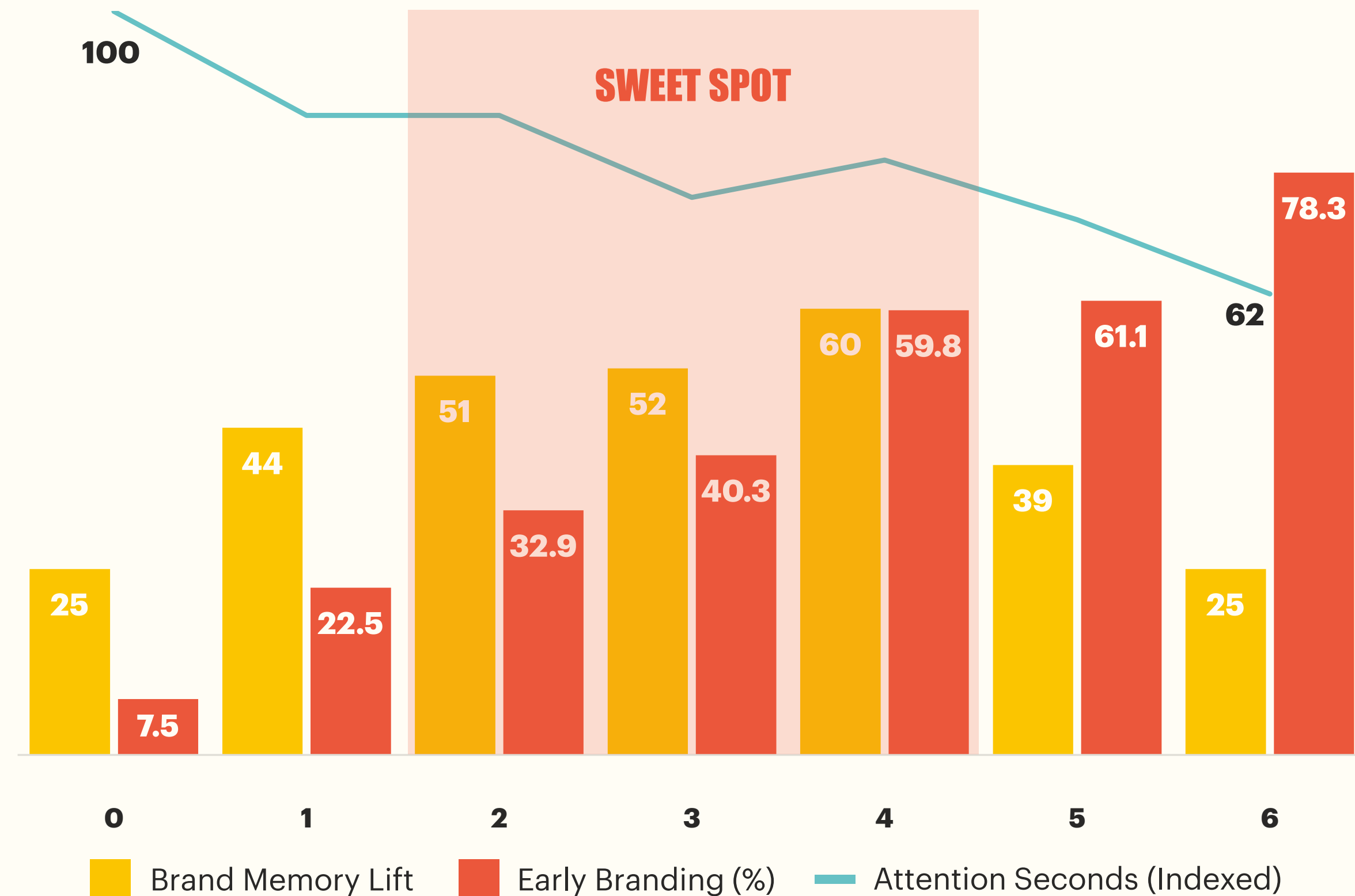
The sweet spot is two to four DBAs in the first two seconds. At four cues, Brand Memory Lift is strongest while attention still holds. Beyond that point, recognition may continue to rise, but attention starts to suffer and the overall memory return falls.

This is the discipline creators need from the brief. Use sound and sight together. Integrate the brand into the action. Let the cue feel like part of the content.

Say it. Show it. No more than four.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT, EARLY BRANDING & ATTENTION

By the number of DBAs used in the first 2 seconds



Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social among 93,000 TikTok users across 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), with a mixture of measured and modeled Brand Memory Lift using TikTok Brand Lift Studies. Brand Memory Lift bars scaled so peak (DBA=4) aligns with Early Branding peak for visual comparison; raw BML uplifts range 3.1-7.5%. Early Branding = share of ads with a brand cue in the first two seconds. Attention (Seconds) = average seconds watched. Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

PLATFORM FIT IS THE FINAL CREATOR ADVANTAGE

By this point, the brief has done the heavy lifting.

Entertainment creates emotion. Early Branding gives the brand the credit. Platform Fit is the final test: does the work still feel like it belongs in the feed, in the creator's hands, and congruent with why someone launched TikTok in the first place?

Creators bring much of this with them. They understand the pacing, framing, tone, format and behavior that feel native to the platform. That is part of what brands are buying when they work with creators.

In this data, entertainment plus Early Branding increases Brand Memory by around +69% versus creator ads weak on both.

Platform Fit adds a final lift on top. When entertaining, well-branded creator ads also have high Platform Fit, Brand Memory rises to around +79% above the weak baseline. The incremental gain from Platform Fit is around +6%.

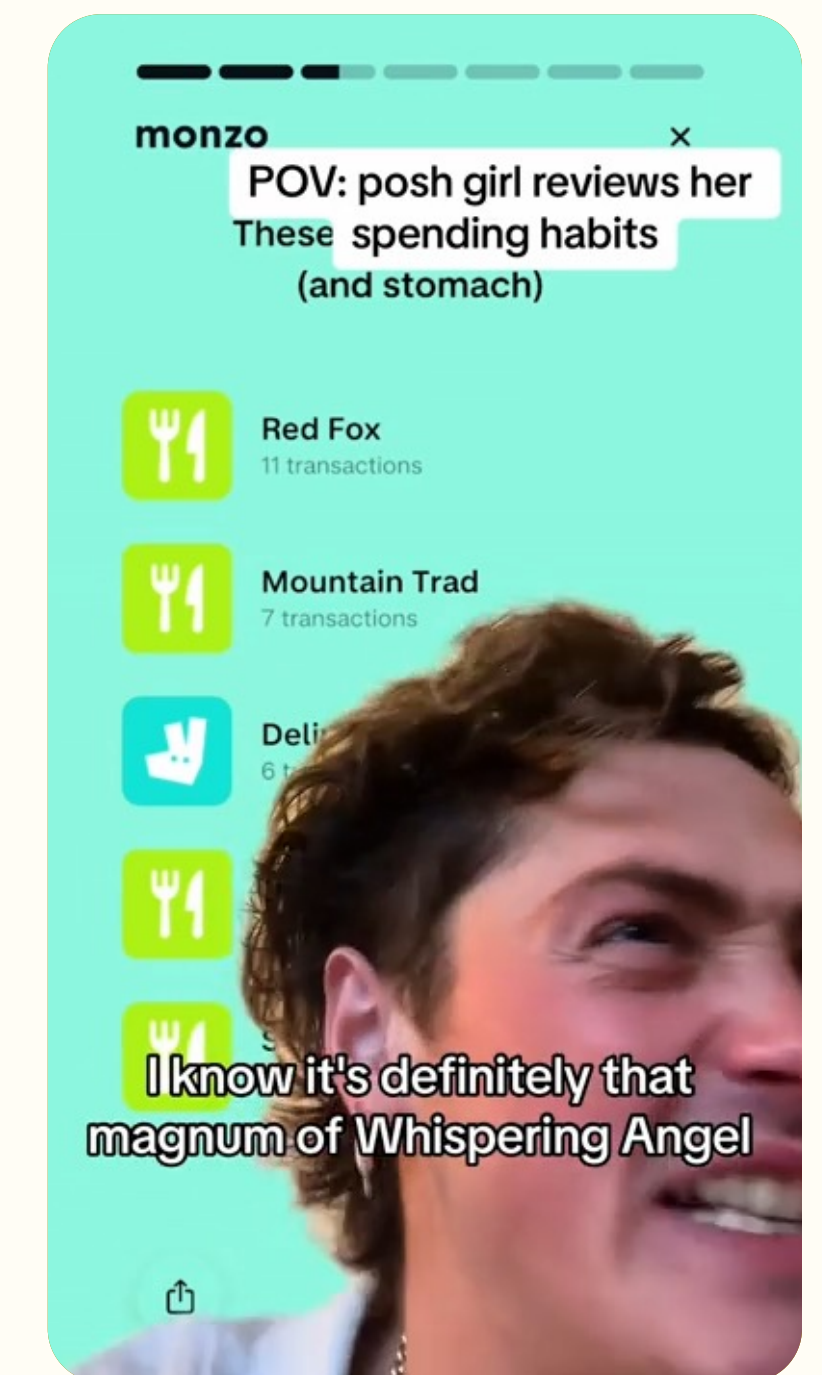
So Platform Fit matters, but it works best when it is built into the creator setup rather than forced into the edit. Choose the right creator, understand the world they have built, and brief in a way that lets the ad still feel native.

**WHEN ENTERTAINING,
WELL-BRANDED CREATOR
ADS ALSO HAVE HIGH
PLATFORM FIT,
BRAND MEMORY LIFTS
+79%.**

**THE INCREMENTAL GAIN
FROM PLATFORM FIT IS
+6%.**

#BRIEF

#PLATFORMFIT



Monzo's partnership with Henry Rowley (@henryrowleyy) achieved the highest Platform Fit of all the ads in our study.

Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social among 93,000 TikTok users across 8 markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Mexico), with a mixture of measured and modeled Brand Memory Lift using TikTok Brand Lift Studies.

THE SOCIAL DEVICE

The social device is one of the most powerful levers a creator can give a brand and it works right across the creator effectiveness model.

A Social Device is a Distinctive Creator Asset: a recognizable, repeatable format (a place, prop, persona, phrase, sound or behavior) that audiences clock on sight, before the content has to explain itself.

It is not a brand asset. The creator owns it. The brand enters it.

Recognition helps, but the bigger lift is intrigue. The same device, used consistently, signals there's a payoff coming. And the more it repeats, the more it compounds, sharpening recognition and lifting attention with every appearance.

That mechanic compounds across the model. It lifts Creator Fame, because the creator's world becomes instantly recognizable. It strengthens Brand Fit, because the product has a clearer, pre-built role to play. It enables Early Branding, because the brand cue can be designed into the setup rather than pasted on top. It elicits emotion because the format already carries the tone and pacing the audience is primed to enjoy. And it secures Platform Fit, because the work feels native before the brand adds a single instruction.

A blunt brand cue interrupts. A strong social device keeps the audience watching while the brand finds its way in.



Boots made their store a central part of **Alex Haddon's (@Alex_Haddon)** social device where he does 'People Watching'.



Curry's partnered with **Big John (@boshtok)** using his social device and famous catchphrase "Bosh!" to promote Curry's line of Bosch products.



Maybelline partnered with **Bemi Orojuogun**, also known as **Bus Auntie (@omo.oroje)**, making Maybelline a part of her recognizable social device appearing in front of London buses.

#SOCIALDEVICE

#BRIEF

SOCIAL DEVICE DEFINITION

A SOCIAL DEVICE IS A CREATOR-OWNED SHORTCUT TO RECOGNITION. A REPEATED CUE, FORMAT OR SIGNATURE BEHAVIOR THAT SHOWS THE AUDIENCE WHAT THEY'RE WATCHING IN THE FIRST SECOND. IT COMPOUNDS FAMILIARITY BUT ALSO BUILDS DRAMA, INTEREST AND EMOTION.

“ The Social Device is a modern effectiveness hack, tapping into platform and human behavior.

Campaigns using them see more creator recognition, brand and platform fit, while boosting attention and emotion. ”



ANDREW TINDALL
CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER
SYSTEM1

BRIEF WITH DISCIPLINE. NOT VISIBLE CONTROL.

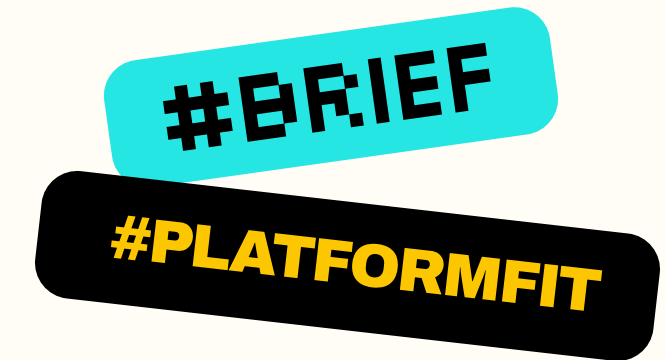
Creators know how to make creator ads that belong in the feed. That is part of why they get hired. Creators are platform-native by design. Choose the right creator and much of that work is already done. However, there is a balance to be struck when briefing.

Too little structure and the creator may entertain while the brand disappears. Too much control and the creator ad starts to feel scripted, self-conscious or over-directed. The brief should define the feeling, the product role, the brand cues and the opening seconds. It should not choreograph the performance.

Text-heavy overlays, too many words on screen, self-consciousness and hard CTAs all reduce Star Rating. The things brands add to feel safer can be the things that kill the emotion.

Let creators do what they do best: make it feel native and entertaining. Then give them the brand discipline to make the memory yours.

OVERDIRECTION KILLS EMOTION



FEATURE	IMPACT ON EMOTION (STAR RATING)
Many words on screen	-12%
Self-consciousness	-8.8%
“Told me to do something” or a hard call-to-action	-7.3%

Base for this analysis: 620 paid creator ads on TikTok measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social, with 93,000 TikTok users.

#STRATEGY #BRIEF

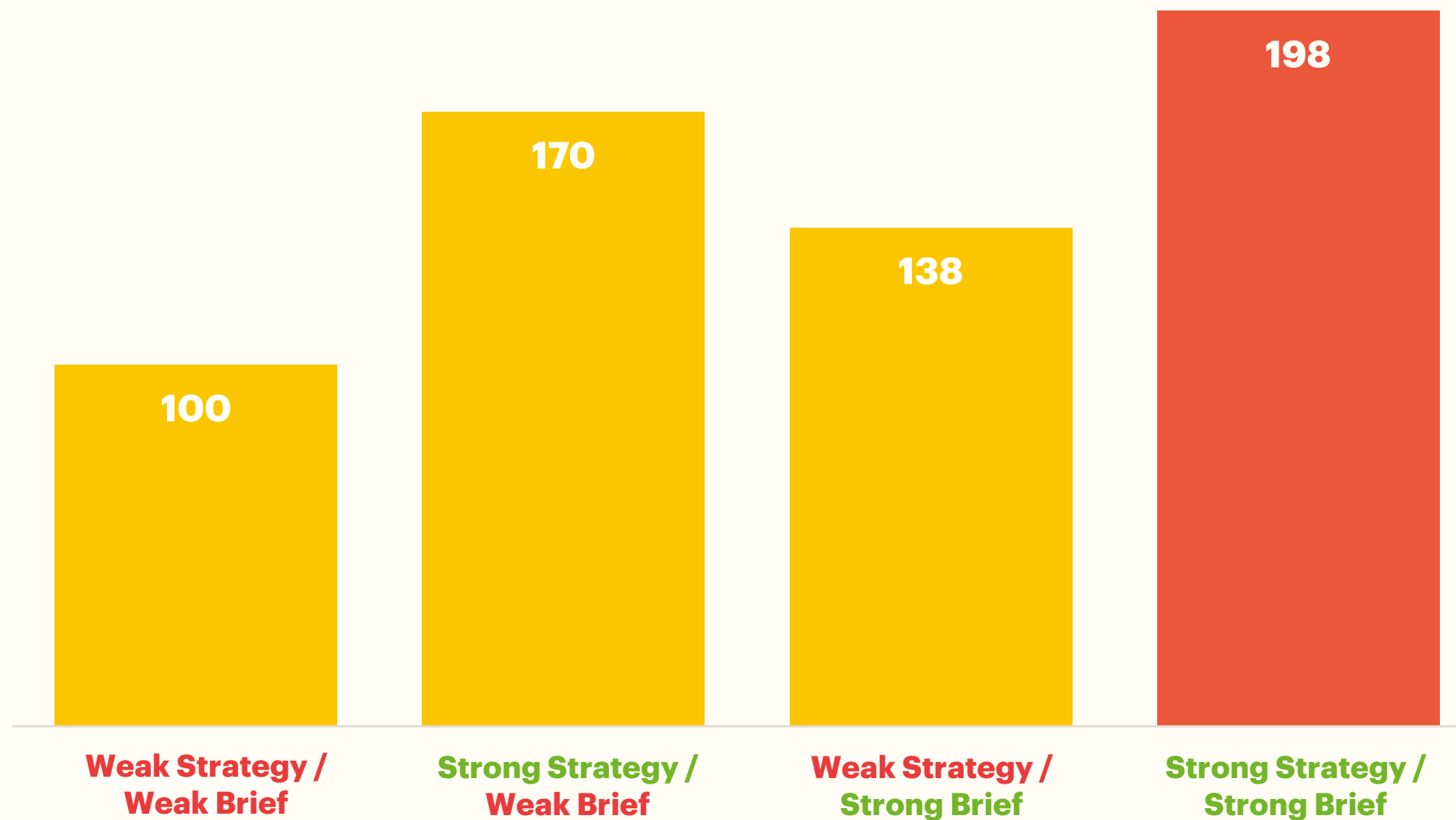
YOU CAN'T OUTBRIEF A BAD STRATEGY

Strategy is Creator Fame and Brand Fit: picking a recognized creator whose world the brand belongs in. The brief is: entertaining, early branding, platform-native execution. Brand Memory Lift peaks when both are high. Creator ads with strong strategy and a great brief deliver roughly double the lift of those with neither. But order matters. Strong strategy with a weak brief still beats a great brief built on a weak one. You can lift a strong strategy further. You can't outbrief a bad one.

Strategy first. Always. Then let a great brief compound it.

BRAND MEMORY LIFT

Asset-Level Modeled Awareness & Recall Growth (Indexed)



Base for this analysis: 239 creator ads measured with System1 Test Your Ad Social among 35,850 TikTok users, with modeled Brand Memory Lift at ad level from TikTok Brand Lift Studies. Strong strategy = above-average Creator Recognition AND Brand Fit. Strong brief = above-median Entertainment Index, used here as a directional proxy for Creative Quality and Platform Fit. Creator Recognition measured through: "Do you recognize this creator/influencer/celebrity?" Brand Fit measured through top-2-box agreement with: "How well suited was this creator/influencer/celebrity for the brand they were advertising?" Brand Memory Lift = Brand Awareness Lift and Ad Recall Lift, weighted 2:1.

PART 3 TAKEAWAYS

HOW TO PLAN

STRATEGY BUILDS CREATOR FAME AND BRAND FIT.

Start with the human need, not the creator's name. Let the need tell you which world to search. Then pick for Creator Fame (recognizability, the right kind, not simply follower count) and Brand Fit. Recognition can come from a face or a social device: the place, prop or behavior the audience already knows. Get this right and the brand belongs before the brief is written.

1

THE BRIEF BUILDS CREATIVE QUALITY.

Brief for entertainment over explanation. Showmanship features pull attention, emotion and Brand Memory up together; salesmanship features push them down. Then make the memory the brand's: say it and show it in the opening seconds, with no more than four native cues. And brief with discipline, leaving room to perform. Overdirection kills the emotion the creator was hired to create.

2

PLATFORM FIT IS THE FINAL CHECK.

Platform Fit is a secondary lever, not a primary one. Pick the right creator and most of the work is already done, because creators are platform-native by design. The remaining job is making sure framing, pacing, format and edit don't undo it. Get all three pillars right and the creator ad clears the bar: entertaining, Early Branding, native.

3

FINAL WORD

**CREATORS
BUILD BRANDS WHEN
THEY BUILD MEMORY**

Creators have earned their place in advertising, and the evidence is now strong enough to move the conversation on.

The IPA shows creator activity paying back commercially, with a particular strength over the long term. Effie and System1 show creators as one of the strongest touchpoints for building future demand. Our own analysis shows why that can happen: creator ads can build more Brand Memory Lift than brand ads, provided the creator ad makes people feel something and gives the brand the credit for that feeling.

That final condition matters.

The creator channel has too often been judged by the easiest numbers to collect: followers, impressions, views, likes, comments and Engagement Rate. Those signals can be useful for understanding what happened around a post, but they are weak substitutes for the question that determines whether a creator ad has built the brand: did people remember who it was for?

This playbook gives marketers a better scoreboard and a more useful planning model.

Brand Memory Lift is strongest when three levers work together. Creative Quality creates the feeling and makes the brand recognizable. Creator Fame gives the creator ad a head start, whether that recognition comes from the creator, their world or the social device that makes that world familiar. Brand Fit makes the brand feel like it belongs there, so the product has a natural role in the moment the creator is bringing to life.

When those levers stack, creator effectiveness becomes far less of a gamble.

FINAL WORD

**CREATORS
BUILD BRANDS WHEN
THEY BUILD MEMORY**

#CREATOREFFECTIVENESS

1 CREATORS BUILD BRANDS

Creator activity pays back over the long term. In our data, creator ads also drive more Brand Memory Lift than brand ads. That makes creators a route to future demand, not just posts, views or short-term response.

3 CREATIVE QUALITY IS THE BIGGEST LEVER

Creative Quality, emotion plus Early Branding, explains brand memory around **five times** better than the strongest engagement metric, and **more than doubles** Brand Memory Lift on its own.

5 BRAND FIT BEATS CREATOR FAME

Creator Fame is **recognition, not reach**. A smaller creator in the right world beats a bigger one the brand is bolted onto. If you can only get one right, prioritize **Brand Fit**.

2 ENGAGEMENT IS A WEAK SCOREBOARD

Engagement Rate explains around **0.2%** of Brand Memory Lift. Likes, views and comments show people reacted, not that they remembered the brand. Judge creators on branded memory.

4 THE RIGHT CREATOR AND CREATIVE STACK TO 4X

No single lever wins alone. Stack high Creative Quality, Creator Fame and Brand Fit and Brand Memory Lift climbs to **almost four times** a weak baseline. The combination is the headline.

6 YOU CAN'T OUTBRIEF BAD STRATEGY

Strategy sets Creator Fame and Brand Fit. The brief builds Creative Quality through entertainment and Early Branding. A great brief makes a good setup work harder, but it cannot rescue the wrong creator, world or brand role.



APPENDIX

THE METHODOLOGY

Measuring how creator ads build brand memory.

WPP Media

System1

Create with Confidence®

TikTok

ONE CONNECTED EVIDENCE SYSTEM. ONE CONSISTENT OUTCOME.

1,217 short-form ads were tested on TikTok across 8 markets (the US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil and Mexico) among 182,550 TikTok users through System1's Test Your Ad Social. Of these, 620 are creator ads and 597 brand-made, so creator and brand advertising are judged on exactly the same scoreboard.

Brand Memory Lift figures. We analyzed 687 Brand Memory Lift figures in all. 337 were measured directly through TikTok Brand Lift Studies; the remaining 350 were modeled from System1 Test Your Ad Social data. Every ad is scored on Star Rating, Early Branding, attention, brand-asset recognition, entertainment and Salesmanship features, spontaneous associations and diagnostic responses, then matched to Brand Lift outcomes to find which signals predict Brand Memory Lift.

Creator-size and Brand Fit coding. Within the creator set, 239 ads carry extra coding for creator size and Brand Fit, powering the recognition, follower-tier and brand-creator-fit cuts used in Parts 2 and 3.

Brand Memory Lift. A weighted composite of two Brand Lift outcomes, both against a matched control: Brand Awareness and Ad Recall, in a 2:1 ratio. Brand Awareness carries the heavier weight because it captures whether a memory has attached to the brand itself; Ad Recall confirms the ad was encoded in the first place. Together they show whether the audience built more useful brand memories, not whether they liked the ad in the moment.

Creator sizes. Creators are classified by follower count on the platform the ad ran on:



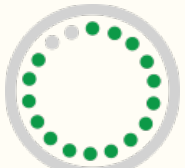
- **Micro:** 10k-100k
- **Mid:** 101k-300k
- **Macro:** 301k-1M
- **Celebrity:** over 1M or public figures with off-platform fame

UNDERSTANDING AND PREDICTING HOW SOCIAL ADS GROW BRANDS AND CONVERT DEMAND

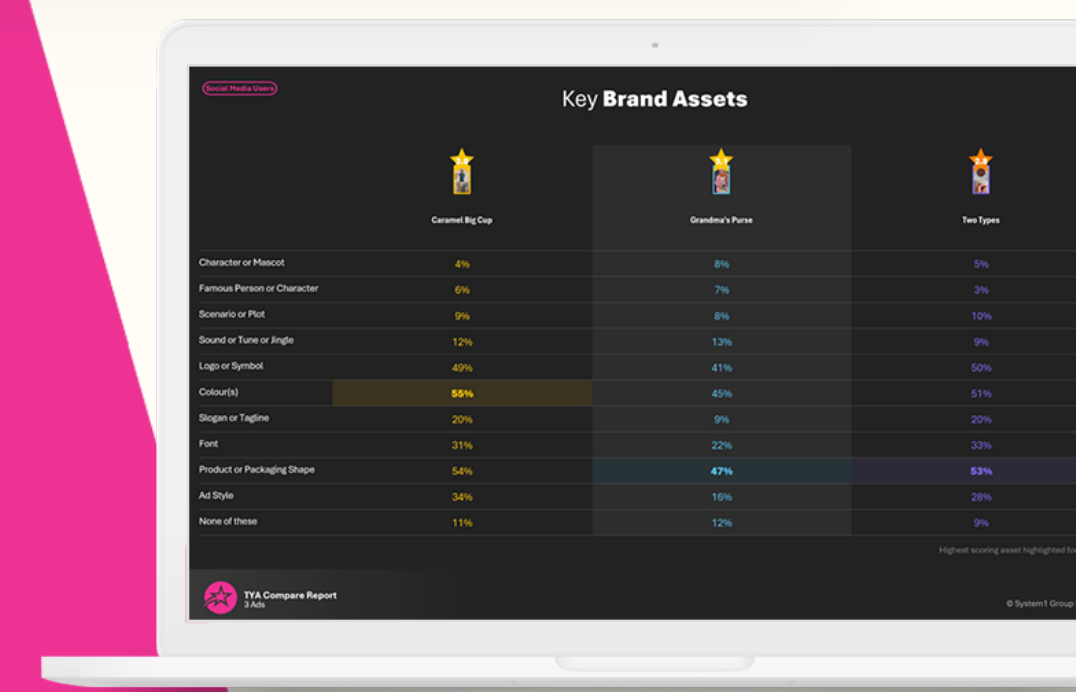
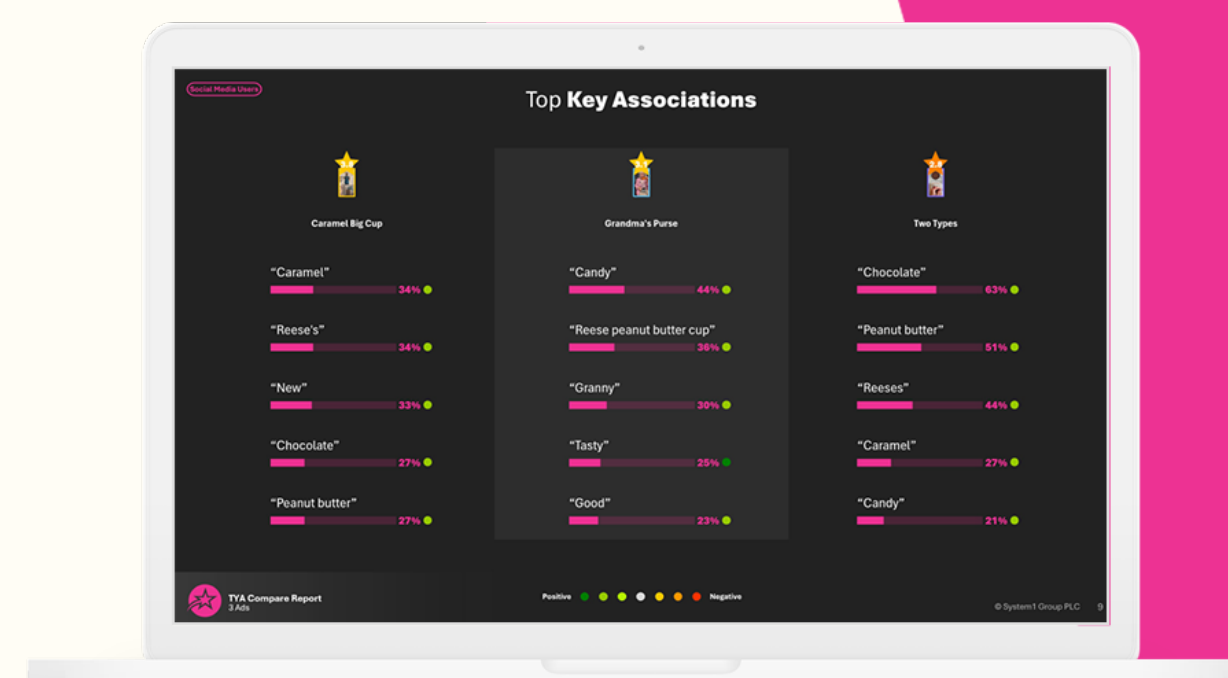
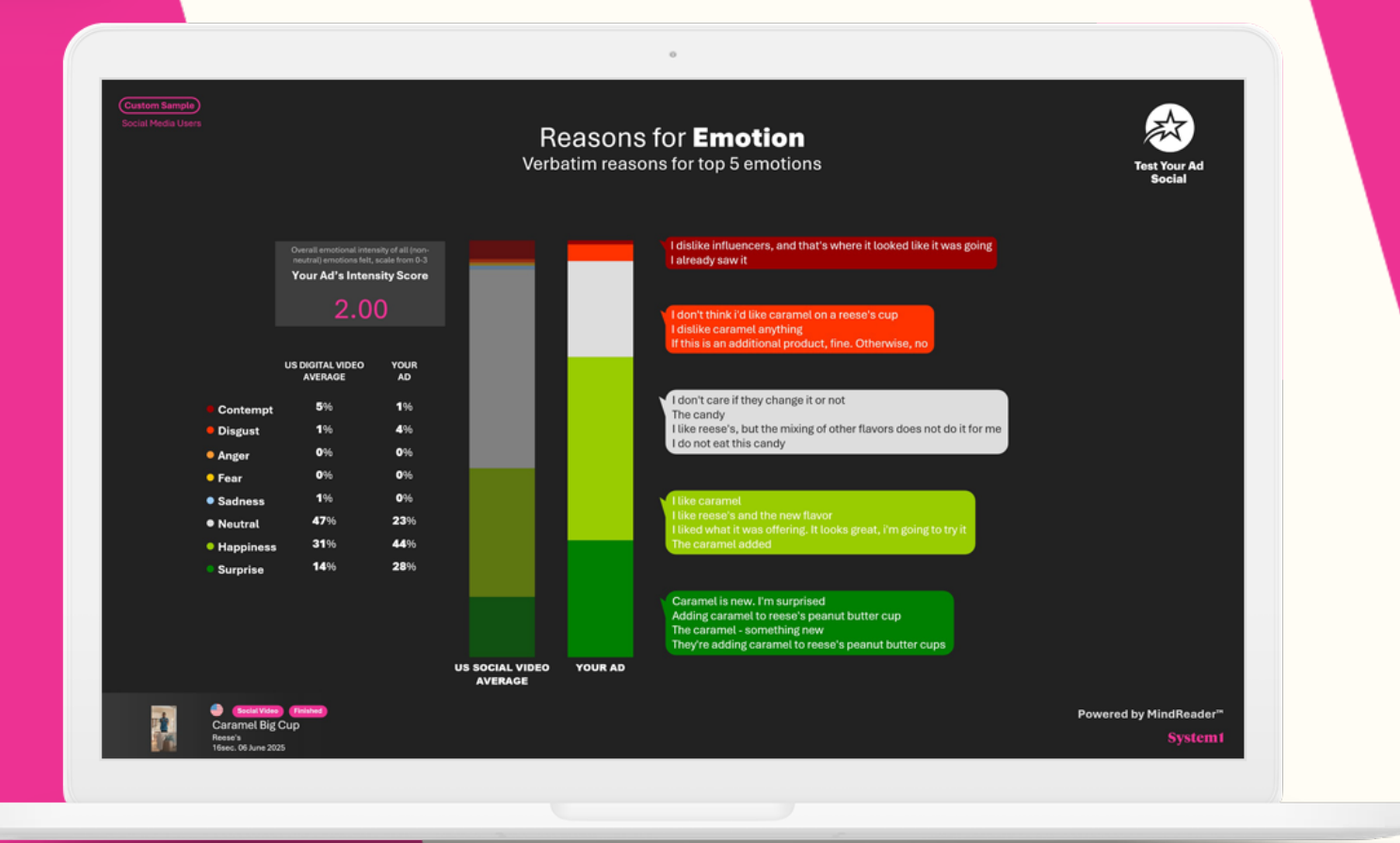
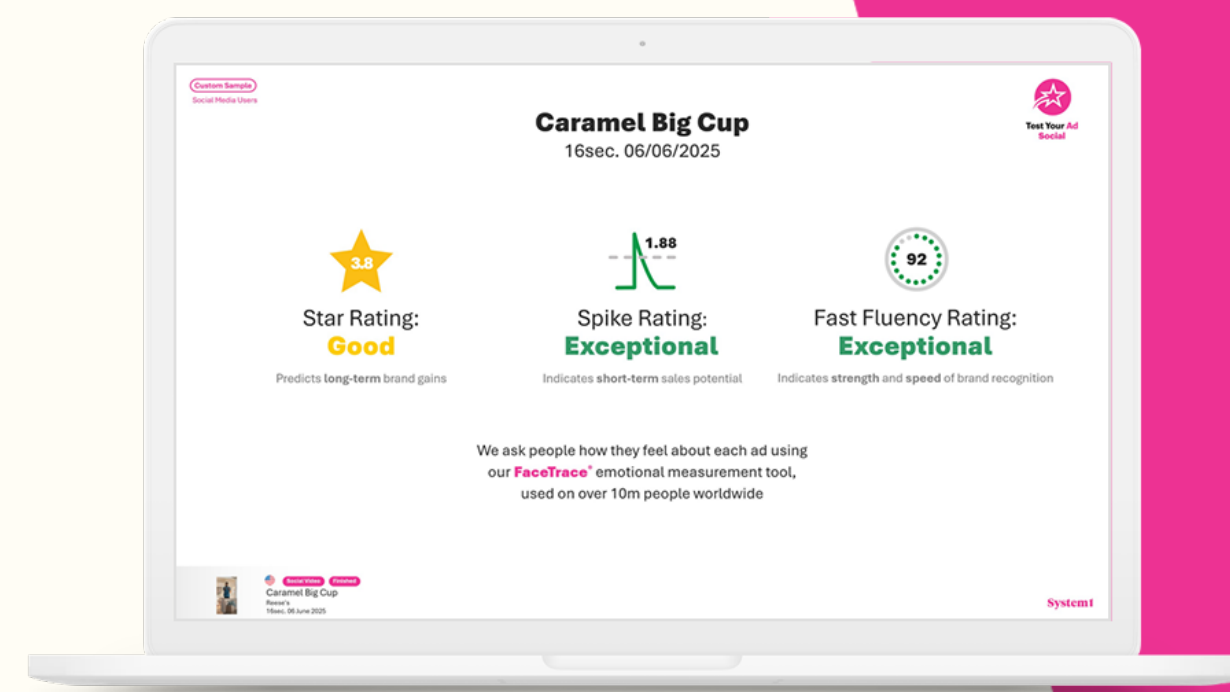
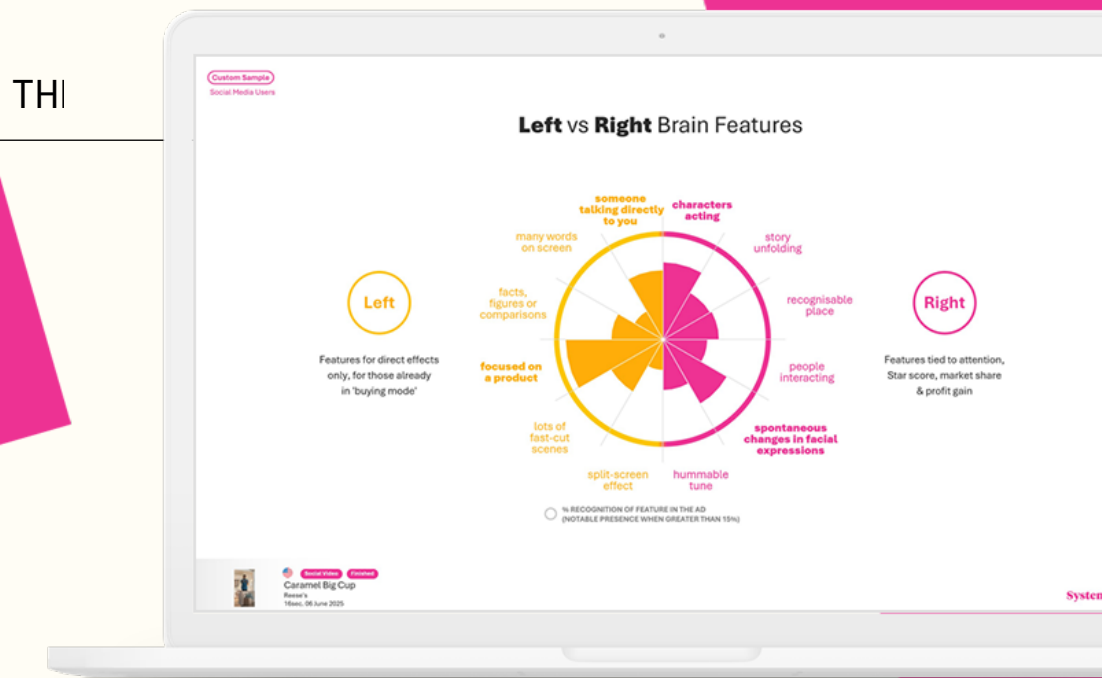
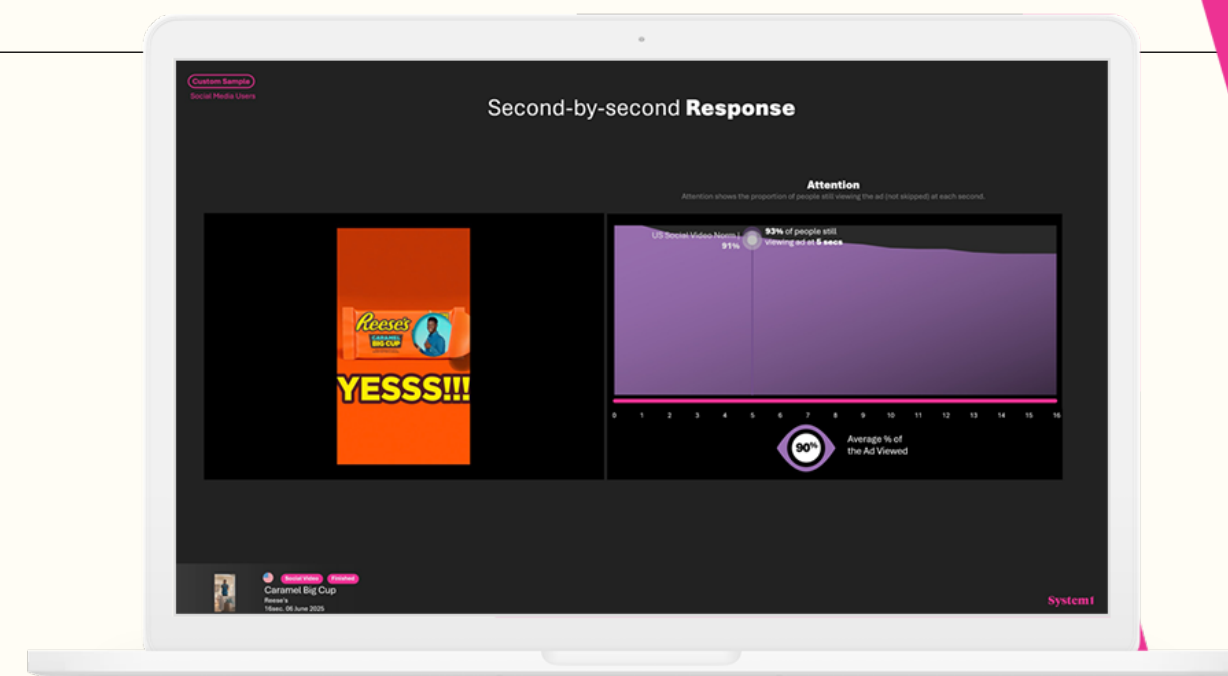
We used **System1's Test Your Ad Social** to analyze each short-form ad, a research tool built on 25 years of experience linking creativity to in-market outcomes, as we've done in this research.

Test Your Ad Social measures how 150 social platform users feel after viewing a short-form ad in a skippable environment, how much attention each ad holds, and whether they can correctly recall the brand the ad is for (and how quickly).

You'll see its key metrics used throughout this paper:

- 
Star Rating The overall sentiment felt, predicting an ad's long-term impact.
- 
Spike Rating Whether an ad brands early enough and how engaging it is, predicting short-term impact.
- 
Fluency Rating Correct brand attribution after watching for 2 seconds and after skipping.

Each test also collects diagnostic data that you'll see in this research, including which **Showmanship and Salesmanship Creative Features** and **Brand Assets** were recognized, as well as **Spontaneous Associations** and the **Reasons Why** users felt the way they did.



WHAT WE CAN, AND CAN'T, CLAIM

How to read this playbook, and how to pressure-test it fairly.

A playbook is only as good as the claims it will defend. So, plainly, here is what this evidence supports, what it doesn't, and how to use it without overreaching. The findings rest on 687 Brand Memory Lift figures, drawn from a creative-testing sample of 1,217 paid TikTok ads tested among 182,550 TikTok users. Of these figures, 337 were measured directly through TikTok Brand Lift Studies and 350 were modeled from System1 Test Your Ad, with the modeled outcomes calibrated against the 337 measured studies. Within the sample, 620 are creator ads, and a 239-strong UK subset was coded in more depth for Brand Fit and Creator Fame.

Brand Memory Lift is a 2:1 weighted composite of Brand Awareness and Ad Recall lift, measured against a brand-size-matched control.

WHAT THIS EVIDENCE SUPPORTS

- Measured evidence comes first. The headline Engagement vs Creative Quality comparison is based solely on the 90 directly measured TikTok Brand Lift Studies in our creator campaigns. No modelled Brand Memory Lift outcomes are used. The asset-level model is then used to explore further patterns from that independently observed foundation.
- These are not just survey opinions. System1 survey signals were matched to real in-market TikTok Brand Lift outcomes, so every creative measure is tested against what actually moved brand memory.
- Engagement is not a reliable scoreboard for Brand Memory. Across the creator campaigns analyzed, Engagement Rate has no significant relationship with Brand Memory Lift, while the comments-to-like ratio has a significant but weak one ($p < .001$).
- Creative Quality has far greater explanatory power. Engagement Rate explains about 0.2% of Brand Memory Lift and comments-to-likes about 11.3%, while emotion (Star Rating) explains about 28.1% and Creative Quality about 54.6%. These vary by market and brand, but the message holds: creative quality deserves more focus than chasing engagement rate.
- Entertainment can close the size gap. The most entertaining micro creators can perform in the same territory as much larger ones, while without entertainment, outcomes cluster at the low end across every tier.
- Strategy sets the ceiling and the brief compounds it. High strategy, Creator Fame plus Brand Fit, is associated with nearly double the Brand Memory Lift of weak strategy. A high-strategy ad with a great brief, Creative Quality plus Platform Fit, roughly doubles the lift of one weak on both, and a strong strategy beats a great brief when only one of the two lands.

WHAT IT DOESN'T

- Modelled findings are predictive diagnostics, not independent causal tests. Asset-level Brand Memory Lift is estimated from 20+ Test Your Ad Social signals. Some overlap with inputs to Star Rating and Early Branding, so relationships involving modelled outcomes may partly reflect the model's construction. The model was validated on a separate holdout sample and the central relationships held.
- This doesn't prove causation. The modeling quantifies relationships in this dataset; explanatory power describes statistical fit, not a causal guarantee or a measure of real-world business growth.

- This isn't a business-results study. We measure Brand Memory, a leading indicator, not sales, penetration, profit, or long-term share. Brand Lift points toward long-term commercial effect, but it isn't final proof of it. Memory is how advertising compounds over time, which is why we treat Brand Memory Lift as a leading indicator of performance.
- This doesn't tell you what to spend. We don't model media cost, reach, pricing, distribution, competitor activity, or base demand. Budget and ROI decisions need marketing mix modeling, experiments, and commercial data.
- This isn't universal. The core analysis covers paid creator advertising on TikTok, with a UK deep-dive and global short-form context, not every platform, market, or category, and not organic creator posts. Per-Star and per-cue figures are directional, drawn from fitted curves. External IPA, Effie, and How Humans Decide analyses are supporting context, not findings re-run inside this study.
- And engagement isn't worthless. It can signal reaction and platform behavior. It is simply not a reliable proxy for whether the brand was remembered when comparing campaigns. It may prove more useful when compared within a campaign.

HOW TO USE IT WELL

- Treat this as an early tool for priming the brand through creator ads. It is about whether impressions build branded memories, the priming that How Humans Decide shows decides most purchases, not a replacement for the fundamentals of growth, which remain broad reach, physical availability, and distribution. The work on needs and creator worlds is about creative framing that travels in-feed, not about narrowing your buyer base, so plan for broad reach once the work is proven. Use the brief, Creative Quality, and Platform Fit to decide what to scale and what to remake, then validate against business measurement wherever you can.
- The claim this playbook makes is strong but bounded: in this evidence, creator effectiveness, measured as the Brand Memory that primes a future choice, is built far more by the emotional and brand response to the ad than by engagement.

THE CREATOR EFFECTIVENESS PLAYBOOK

How to build your brand with creators



WPP Media

System1

 TikTok